

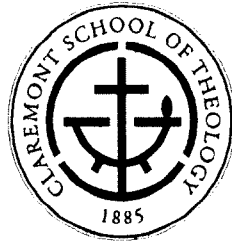
**LAST CALL:
A NEW PRACTICE OF RECEIVING A PASTOR IN THE BAPTIST CHURCH BASED
UPON A BIBLICAL PARADIGM THAT CHALLENGES THE CALL SYSTEM**

**A Professional Project
presented to
the Faculty of
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**In Partial Fulfillment
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Doctor of Ministry**

**by
Harold Eugene Vann II**

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This professional project completed by

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has been presented to and accepted by the
faculty of Claremont School of Theology in
partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

LAST CALL: A NEW PRACTICE OF RECEIVING A PASTOR IN THE BAPTIST CHURCH BASED UPON A BIBLICAL PARADIGM THAT CHALLENGES THE CALL SYSTEM

Harold Eugene Vann II

Baptist polity operationalizes the call system, a process that *congregational* churches use to select, elect and deselect pastors. An aspect of that polity is autonomy that declares each local Baptist church is a self-governing entity. In this context, lay authority has the potential to be misused and the laity can deselect a pastor at their will. This project, a case study is the presentation of a church to show how the call system works from candidacy to deselection. This study calls for an additional layer of pastoral oversight and recommends that pastors lead Baptist laity in securing pastors. The problem addressed by this project is imbalance in power and authority held by Baptist laity and manifested in the call system. Finally, a new plan is presented for receiving a pastor that is led by a *Board of Pastors*, which restores balance, and is built on a theological/biblical paradigm that indicates that God gives and sends pastors that are received by a congregation.

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Chapter 1

Project Proposal

LAST CALL:

A NEW PRACTICE OF RECEIVING A PASTOR IN THE BAPTIST DENOMINATION
BASED UPON A BIBLICAL PARADIGM THAT CHALLENGES THE CALL SYSTEM

Problem Addressed by this Project

The problem addressed by this project is the need for a paradigm of governance that allows Baptist churches to receive a pastor in contrast to the call system in Baptist polity that emphasizes autonomy of local congregations and the role of the congregational vote in calling a pastor.

Importance of the Problem

After being *called* to be the pastor of Rural Baptist Church (henceforth referred to as RBC), three statements were made to me that suggest that lay authority has become unilateral. The first statement was made immediately after the church voted me in as the pastor on Sunday, December 1, 1997. A member said, "Congratulations! You're our new pastor. Now, you just preach, and we'll do the rest." Some time later, a trustee made the second statement in an administrative meeting while discussing some proposed changes for the church. In disagreement, the woman pointed her finger at me and said, "This is my church! I was born here! We hired you!" The third statement came from a deacon of the church during a private meeting approximately a month into my pastorate. He was upset with me because I changed the order of service without prior approval from the deacons. He asked, "Who gave you permission to change the order of the service, and why didn't you come to the deacons first to get permission to do so?" I expressed my belief that

I was led by the Spirit to do so. He replied, "That's not true. You are the pastor because we voted for you."

These statements convey a mentality of control, unilateral authority, and a presumption of managerial hierarchical obligation. These expressions point to the importance of the problem that the laity in this Baptist church believes and operates out of a sense of authority to dictate the affairs of *their* church.

As a *candidate* for the pastoral position at RBC, and later as pastor-elect, and voted into the pastoral position, I was ejected without a vote on Monday, March 15, 2004 by some of the members. That action makes the process of calling pastors the issue and therefore interesting. Did the members who acted unilaterally consider the morality of their decision and actions and the consequences of ejecting me in that fashion, which resulted in RBC losing more than 250 of its 300 members? I was voted in, in accordance with their bylaws, which state that the selection and deselection of a pastor must be conducted by a majority vote, but I was ejected without a vote. Therefore, ejecting me from the pastorate in that manner was unjust. Why did twenty-three of 300 members think they had the authority to tell me to leave the church? The whole process left an impression on me in different ways. This was my first pastoral experience and it wounded and scarred me. It also wounded many members. I seriously contemplated leaving pastoral ministry. In the aftermath, many members struggled with their faith.

I am interested in the practice of the *call* system, the candidacy process, which requires voting, and the authority that is necessary for this practice. While operative in church, a sacred space, many members presuppose that this practice is

spiritual. In this democratic process, the majority rule with the decision being final. But is deciding who the pastor will be in this fashion congruent with a biblical paradigm? Do voting and the majority vote indicate God has consented? In that perspective, the research question is: How can this writer intentionally develop a congregational process for receiving a pastor in Baptist congregations that is congruent with a biblical paradigm that is spiritual and faithful to an authentic partnership between clergy and laity in ensuring God's presence?

This project provides a model that has two important dimensions: (1) it establishes a procedure that is based on biblical understandings for connecting pastors to Baptist congregations, and (2) it repositions laity to faithful participation in a process in which pastors are sent and congregations receive them without imposing their will as in the call system.

This work can be a resource that will assist Baptist churches in being faithful Christians that utilize authority responsibly. It can be helpful to pastors who are looking for a pastorate and congregations that are in need of a new pastor. This work can generate a dialogue on the issue of growing power struggles that exist in many churches due to authority becoming unilateral. With regard to pastors and persons who are preparing for ordained ministry, the M.Div. program is designed to prepare the student for pastoral ministry. But reflecting on the issues that arose at RBC, as it pertains to this writer, conclusively more theological training was necessary for the pastorate. At Duke Divinity School, my Alma Mater, the curriculum is designed to teach students about Christian Theology, Church history,

and biblical interpretation, but no course existed to adequately prepare this writer for effective pastoral ministry at RBC and the issue that was faced.

In their article entitled, “An Introduction to Pastoral and Practical Theology,” pastoral theologians Stephen Pattison and James Woodward propose a definition, which states: “Pastoral theology might be seen in broad terms as the theological reflection and underpinning that guided pastoral care directed towards ensuring the individual and corporate wellbeing and flourishing for the Christian ‘flock.’ Pastoral ministry is an expression of care, and with theological seriousness it is a critical act of loving and guiding the people of God.”¹ Pastoral theology helps this writer understand and interpret the practice of calling pastors in a local Baptist church. It is a reflexive discipline in that it helps discover a theology of *acting*, and it is a dialectical movement from practice to theory, to critical reflection on practice that gives rise to new ways of acting (and more authentic practice).

This work is based on the concept that pastors are depicted biblically as authorized leaders of laity and that one use of that authority is naming and supplying pastors for local churches. When laity is overly involved in selecting pastors, as with the call system, by assessing the congregation, compiling a pastors’ profile, searching for candidates, interviewing, examining and evaluating and hiring pastors, the laity’s excessive involvement is incongruent with a biblical paradigm of God’s utilizing pastors to lead the laity in this regard. Through a new pastoral theology, Baptist pastors should reconsider repositioning themselves with authority

¹ Stephen Pattison and James Woodward, “An Introduction to Pastoral and Practical Theology”, in the *Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, Eds. Stephen Pattison and James Woodward (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 2.

to lead the laity and assist with realizing who should serve as their pastors. The relevance of this project to professional leadership in the Church is it discusses the pastoral position as a type of leader planned by God and thus one, which is positioned with the right to gather, guide, and govern the people of God.

Thesis

This study sets forth a new paradigm for receiving pastors in Baptist congregations that is based on encouraging the use of a *Board of Pastors* to assist a local congregation in identifying and receiving a pastor without the need for a congregational vote.

Definition/Highlighting Major Terms

(1) **Call System:** The process used by denominations where local congregations select, elect (and deselect) their own pastors rather than having them appointed by some judicatory group or person.

(2) **Appointment System:** The process used by some denominations in which the judicatory appoints pastors to serve local congregations. Usually the local church or the local church's leadership has some opportunity to either affirm the appointment or ask the judicatory to reconsider the appointment.

(3) **Autonomous churches:** Local churches within denominations that stress local church autonomy. Denominational judicatories have advisory function but no authority to intervene in local church matters.

(4) **Polity:** A church or denominations' form of government.

(5) **Episcopal:** A form of church governance where authority for decision-making is located with a bishop.

(6) **Congregational:** A form of church governance emphasizing the autonomy, independence, and authority of the local church. The ultimate authority for decision-making resides within the gathered congregation.

Work Previously Done in the Field

Edward T. Hiscox is a Baptist scholar and experienced Pastor whose comprehensive work, *The Hiscox Guide for Baptist Churches* (1964) discusses Baptist polity, doctrine and practice. According to Hiscox, every local congregation should secure their pastors by election. He considers this a free choice of the people, and one that is done independently as policy of the New Testament. Stating the position of Baptists, Hiscox makes clear that the choosing of a pastor is based on autonomy. Everett C. Goodwin's work, *The New Hiscox Guide for Baptist Churches* (1995) is intergraded as a more modern thought of Hiscox.

Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson co-authored, *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice* (1963), which also illustrates the foundation of Baptist belief and operating methods. These authors discuss how a congregation should *call* a pastor. Maring and Hudson, in conjunction with Hiscox concur that the authority to select and elect a pastor is the choice, independently of the laity. Maring and Hudson believe that the pastor represents the local congregation and because of such, the invitation to serve a local assembly must come from the members themselves. They argue, specifically, that, "If the ministry belongs ultimately to the church itself, then it is the responsibility of the church to select worthy persons to act as its

representatives in exercising leadership in the ministry of the whole church.”² This presents the question of who declares one “worthy”, and is the criteria idiosyncratic, cultural, or biblical?

Stanton Norman’s work entitled, *The Baptist Way* restates the Baptist distinctions but with a contemporary perspective. His work clarifies some theological perspectives of Baptist identity, namely biblical authority, the Lordship of Christ, church discipline, religious freedom and, of particular concern for this work, congregational polity. This work is consulted because it offers a perspective of the three major forms of church governance, namely: Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational.

On a practical level of calling a pastor, there are the works of Christian Counselor, Henry A. Virkler, *Choosing A New Pastor: The Complete Handbook* and Robert W. Dingman, *The Complete Search Committee Guidebook*. There are multiple books on the suggested procedure for composing a Pastors’ Search Committee and how to call a pastor, but these two works are engaged, as they are exhaustive of the process. In particular, Virkler’s work articulates different denominations’ process of calling a pastor.

This project intends to contribute by bringing awareness to the issue of authority that has the potential of becoming unilateral in the call system, which is the process of selecting, electing, with the potential of deselecting pastors at will. The candidacy process of the call system involves the laity in congregational churches in the task of identifying, interviewing, examining, evaluating the

² Maring, Norman H. and Winthrop S. Hudson, *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1963), 101.

candidate(s), and after the pastor has been elected the congregation monitors him/her, continually. This work recommends that a *Board of Pastors* provide leadership and assistance to the laity in this most important task of the church.

Scope and Limitations of the Project

For the purpose of this interdisciplinary study, this work is a case study based upon one Baptist congregation, RBC, with consideration of two other Baptist congregations for comparative analysis. The focus will be upon the candidacy process in the call system operative in that one church, an autonomous Baptist church. The results of this case study will be discussed in the larger context of the Baptist church and a model will be suggested that all Baptist churches may adopt. The project will discuss a way to involve ordained pastors in the effort to secure a new pastor. When a Board of Pastors is involved, leading and assisting the laity in this most important act of securing a new pastor, it will provide a model that reduces the impulse of local congregations to “hire and fire” their pastor.

Procedure for Integration

This project will recommend a practical way to lessen the responsibility of the laity in securing a new pastor with an understanding that pastors are a type of leader given to local churches with authority to lead and assist in church administration. On the subject of pastoral theology, the work of Thomas Oden’s *Pastoral Theology* (1983) will be emphasized and with regard to a biblical model of decision-making, and Luke Timothy Johnson’s *Decision Making in the Church: A Biblical Model* (1983) is used. Johnson’s perspective is important because this writer claims a need return to a biblical model and he offers that. The primary tool

to be used in this project is library research. In addition, personal interviews are used; interviews with a pastor in the United Methodist Church, and with a Chairman of a Pastor's Search Team, and a professional organization that assists pastors in finding churches in which to serve and churches in efforts of finding a new pastor.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: *Project Proposal*

This chapter states the problem addressed by this project, discusses the importance of the problem, sets the stage for the chapters to follow, and proposes a new method based upon a biblical paradigm. It reveals previous work done in this field and states precisely the demarcation of this project.

Chapter 2: *Biblical and Theological Perspectives*

This chapter presents the result of exegetical work of biblical passages in both Old Testament and New Testament, and a dialogical discussion with partners of other disciplines. The result of the exegetical work points to evidence of a biblical paradigm that supports this writers' claim that God, through ordained clergy, arranges pastoral oversight for the people of God.

Chapter 3: *Baptist Polity and the Call System in the Case Study Church*

This chapter will concentrate on autonomy, one element of polity of the Baptist denomination, and the call system.

Chapter 4: *Case Study: Rural Baptist Church*

Chapter 5: *Last Call: A New Model*

This chapter presents a new model for receiving pastors based upon a biblical paradigm, suggesting, therefore, that Baptist congregations halt utilizing the call system to select, elect and deselect a pastor at will.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

The chapter presents the judgments and decisions reached by the reasonable assessment of the research, and posits recommendations for RBC, the Baptist denomination, pastoral colleagues, and future pastors.

Chapter 2

Biblical and Theological Perspectives

Biblical Perspectives

Biblical exegesis attends to the historical, literary and textual dimensions of a biblical passage in order to interpret the meaning of the text within the biblical and contemporary context. When the Holy Bible is primary and each reader takes biblical interpretation seriously then the community is open to divine revelation and to hearing God's promises. Odil Hannes Steck claims, "The principal task of exegesis is to protect the text's outlook."³ Notably, Steck invites readers to see the text's dimensions and to preserve the meaning. The preservation of the inspired words must motivate every reader in every generation with the same spiritual intent given in the original context. To that, Steck says:

... [T]he meaning originally given, particularly with biblical texts, must be protected over against reader associations about the text, in order that a hermeneutically responsible reception remains on the text's path of meaning, and does not allow the recipient to control the text. Should the historical association disappear, then so would the outlook of the biblical text for today, and it would be fatally replaced by the subjective, arbitrary reflections of 'the text in me.'⁴

This section presents the exegetical work of biblical passages in both Old Testament and New Testament. As a result, this exegetical effort points to evidence of a biblical paradigm that supports this writer's claim that God, through ordained clergy, arranges pastoral oversight for the people of God. The pastor is a type of leader that is important because this person guides the congregation spiritually, particularly. This examination begins with the book of the prophet Jeremiah, which

³ Odil Hannes Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis* (Atlanta: Scholars Pres, 1995), 2.

⁴ Steck, 2.

establishes God's providing pastoral oversight (spiritual leadership) for God's people. There is also reflection on passages in the New Testament to examine congregational life and pastoral ministry. When RBC and other Baptists consider these scriptures, the Word of God can truly remain on its path of meaning and can become preeminent and authoritative at RBC. Then laity, Baptist polity, and the power manifested in the call system, the medium through which laity-controlled Baptist congregations select and elect their pastors, must be reconsidered, and RBC and other Baptist churches will be faithful participants in realizing God's idea of a pastor consonant with a biblical paradigm.

Exegesis of Jeremiah 3:14, 15

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann offers in his work *A Commentary on Jeremiah* insights of a prophet who stood faithful and prophesied restoration of the nation of Israel who were enslaved in Babylonian captivity. With a desire to restore the people and continue the covenantal relationship, God will ordain and give shepherds to ensure that the restored people know and understand God and resume the benefits of being God's chosen people. What's more, shepherds are necessary to ensure that the violation of Torah and scattering of sheep depicted in Ezekiel 34 does not happen again.

The book that bears Jeremiah's name, Brueggemann says, "... is reflective of and responsive to the historical crisis of the last days of Judah, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 587 BCE. This crisis is the dominant and shaping event of the entire Old Testament. The destruction evoked an extensive

theological literature of which the book of Jeremiah is one major component.”⁵

Called to be a prophet in “the last days of the 7th century, Jeremiah witnessed the abrupt collapse of the Assyrian Empire and its prompt displacement by the Babylonians under the governance of Nebuchadnezzar.”⁶ Jeremiah’s witness of God’s word came in the midst of political tension between states and the imperial power of Babylon. Jeremiah reconsidered the terrible events of his day by remembering the covenant established between God and Israel and, therefore, this perspective offers the view that “the city will be dismantled by the will and power of Yahweh (and not by the decision of Babylon), and that a new community of covenantal possibility will emerge after the dismantling, as a free gift of Yahweh.”⁷ Although Judah was subjugated to Babylon, restoration is possible.

The context of Jeremiah 3:14, 15, is located within the 3:1-4:4. The central verses are 14 and 15. Brueggemann subtitles that section, “Return to Me,” which is also one of his chapters that claim that God gives shepherds. According to Brueggemann, the purpose of this unit is to indict the people of Judah and firmly invite them to return to Yahweh, spiritually and physically return to Jerusalem after exile. “This remarkable poem resumes the metaphor of marriage,” Brueggemann explains.⁸ He claims that Yahweh is going against Torah by returning to the “bride,” the nation of Israel. This restoration is profound in the sense that Yahweh appears to be going against Yahweh’s established word, but when seen through a covenantal

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile & Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 1.

⁶ Brueggemann, 1.

⁷ Brueggemann, 7.

⁸ Brueggemann, 41.

lens, as Jeremiah does, the gift is clear that Yahweh is passionate for the nation of Israel. "The central point of Jer. 3:1-4:4 is that God is not like human analogies, but will take the fickle partner back. The remainder of this section is an invitation, a yearning, and an urging for 'return.'"⁹ The central verses are:

(14) "Return, O apostate sons [and daughters], declares Jehovah; for I am Lord over you. And I will take you, one from a city, and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. (15) "And I will give you shepherds according to my heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding."¹⁰

Brueggemann states that these two verses are a part of a unit (vss. 15-18) that echoes the motifs from Ezekiel. The promise of a new shepherd is linked to Ezekiel 34 where shepherds are reprimanded for being derelict and for the scattering of the sheep. God plans to restore the backsliders and return the children of Israel to a *holy* place, literally and figuratively, by giving shepherds who will increase knowledge and understanding.

A word study of the central verses brings out the intention of God's words understood by the prophet Jeremiah: (1) *And I will give*: This phrase has wide application; among them are "appoint," "assign," and "place." This phrase implies that God gives shepherds to point the people of God to spiritual truths that sustain their relationship with God. God chooses this type of leader to ensure God's mission, and mandates are fulfilled. (2) *Shepherds*: "those who tend a flock (people) or pasture it." Shepherds are responsible for the flock. The meaning of this term is used in reference to "kings" (Psalm 78:70-72, Isaiah 44:28, Jeremiah 10:21, 25:35, 36, and Ezekiel 34:1-4). The term shepherd can be used with reference to the entire

⁹ Brueggemann, 43.

¹⁰ All biblical quotes will be taken from the Interlinear Bible.

leadership class; priests and prophets are among them. (3) *Knowledge* and *understanding*. Shepherds are in position to supply the sheep with nutrients of the soul, which are “knowledge” of divine truth concerning the true God and the best interest of humanity that is essential to its salvation and with “understanding” the full interpretation of knowledge—that in receiving the truth, the people might become wise, holy, and happy. If the people of God are to receive knowledge and understanding, they are to have a shepherd. (4) *As my heart*: This phrase expresses the idea that the shepherds that God will give will be faithful to God, thus having the passion for the people of God as God has for the people. This expression suggests that the shepherd is a medium through which God expresses love (passion). Brueggemann suggests that God’s pathos is what motivates God to violate the Torah and take back God’s “wife,” Judah.

Jeremiah 23:1-4 is a unit that reveals Yahweh’s plans to punish the evil shepherds and to replace them with good ones. The central verses are:

(1) Woe to shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, declares Jehovah. (2) So Jehovah the God of Israel says this against the shepherds who shepherd my people: You have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and have not visited them. Behold, I will visit on you the evil of your doings, says Jehovah. (3) And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them there, and will bring them again to their fold. And they shall be fruitful and multiply. (4) And I will raise up shepherds over them who will tend them. And they will fear no more, nor be terrified; nor will they be missing anything says Jehovah.

Biblical commentator William Holladay explains the aim of this unit. He says, “The fact that the passage is both a judgment oracle and a salvation oracle indicates that

it stands at the beginning of a new age for Judah.”¹¹ Holladay says finally of the unit’s intent: “In the premonarchical faith of Israel, it was understood that Yahweh ruled directly, not through human rulers . . . Now in the fresh situation Yahweh must himself take charge before setting human rulers once more over his people.”¹²

The outcome of setting shepherds over God’s people is revealed in Jeremiah 23:2 and the solution is given in 23:4. Holladay explains: “In times past Yahweh has appointed over the people ‘watchmen’ (6:17); now he is redoing the action of v 2: shepherds have shepherded the people wrongly—now he will appoint over them shepherds who will shepherd rightly.”¹³

As we have seen with Jeremiah, the implication is shepherding *rightly*, which requires a call by God and then commissioning that involves protection, attending to needs, strengthening the weak, encouraging and inspiring, and leading by example in pursuit of godliness (this is unlike in Ezekiel 34:4, which states, “You have not made the weak strong, and you have not healed the sick; and you have not bound up the broken. And the banished have not been brought back, and you have not sought the lost; but you rule them with force and with harshness”). One form of shepherding (leadership) in Jeremiah is when God called the prophet (Jeremiah 1:5) to speak to the people of God the thoughts and directives of God. In Jeremiah 6:17 this form of shepherd is called the *watchmen*, who are ordained, called, inspired by God and appointed. As ordained, Jeremiah was *given to that duty*, which he understood and fulfilled. His role as watchman, and shepherd was to speak on

¹¹ William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 615.

¹² Holladay, 615.

¹³ Holladay, 615.

behalf of God and direct the people of God by the words of God. When God *ordains*, God is establishing, setting, and appointing persons to office. An instance of this is found in Leviticus 8:1-36 where the ordination of the priesthood takes place.

The shepherd is necessary in the New Testament for Christians, and an example of ordaining is found in Mark 3:14, 15, "And he made disciples of twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them to proclaim, and to have authority to heal diseases and to cast out demons."

New Testament scholar Luke Timothy Johnson gives insight into God establishing the twelve apostles as leaders over the people, and their spiritual authority was "symbolized by their function of feeding the people (Luke 9:10-17; 12:48; 22:25-30; Acts 4:32-35) . . ." ¹⁴ Johnson notes that, " . . . effective religious authority over Israel, considered as God's people, has passed to the apostles. They rule over the Twelve Tribes of the restored Israel in Jerusalem." ¹⁵ In this symbolic frame, the people recognized the spiritual authority of the apostles by the miracles that accompanied their preaching of the gospel. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament give perspective to a paradigm that God ordains, which means that God gives the ordained to the duty of pastoral ministry. What's more, both testaments give prospect to God's continual method of giving and sending pastors to local churches today.

In the Old Testament the key term might well be *give*, which means God assigns leadership in different types. For instance, priests, prophets, shepherds, and kings. These leaders are necessary to bring the nation of Israel back to God. In the

¹⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 212.

¹⁵ Johnson, 213.

New Testament the key term might well be *sent*—the root of “apostle”—one who is sent (see Luke 9:1-6). It is the act of giving shepherds or sending apostles that connects the two testaments and provides a paradigm for understanding the pastoral role in the church today. God is shepherd over Israel and ordains persons like David as King and priest, and Solomon in temple and spiritual affairs. Ultimately, it is God who is shepherd of God’s people (Psalm 23:1; Ezekiel 34: 11-31). Jesus calls himself the “Good Shepherd” (John 10:11-18). Jesus then calls/invites and ordains the apostles to this same service by commissioning, ordering, and sending. The church has drawn heavily on the image that pastors are shepherds for the flock, the people of God. The writer of the letter to the Ephesians points to divine activity in the ordering of the church. He writes, “And indeed he gave some to be apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; with a view to the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ . . .” These five-fold gifts from Christ are given to the maturing of the body of Christ; the Christian community. According to biblical commentator, Frank Thielman “ . . . shepherds/pastors were . . . leaders within Christian communities who held positions of authority and were charged with the community’s wellbeing.”¹⁶ These gifts come from Christ and are given for the building and edification of the Christian community.

Theological Perspectives

Pastoral theologian, Thomas Oden articulates the significance of the pastoral office, *ordained ministry*, and need of such for the laity, *general ministry*, by

¹⁶ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 276.

suggesting that Baptist congregations must understand that they need the nurturing and emphatic caring of a pastor that fosters the expression of potential of the laity.

He asserts:

The pastoral office implies a clearly definable distinction between the laity (general ministry) and clergy (ordained ministry). The difference is based not on supposed moral superiority or political expediency, but upon the inward call of God to representative service, outwardly confirmed by the whole church in ordination. Laity and clergy are alike in faith, hope, and love. They are equally justified, and both stand in need of the sanctifying power of the Spirit. The difference between clergy and laity cannot be adequately accounted for in the language of superior or and subordinate. Rather, it awaits the sensitive application of intimate interpersonal analogies like those of shepherding, nurturing, and empathic caring that intrinsically respect the latent potentialities of the recipient.¹⁷

Oden's claim and explanation supports the notion that RBC needs a pastor—in the strict sense of the term with understanding of the role of this type of leader that God sends and gives.

Oden eloquently claims that the church is one such organization in which pastoral leadership is absolutely necessary as an expression due to its twofold system, which is God's Spirit and *heart* dwelling between the church, and an appearance of the position of pastor. The church is a sacred community of persons that acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and who have been baptized into this consecrated corporate entity. The church is called to be a community through which God may move and affect God's will on the earth and, in part, that movement is through the pastor. In agreement, theologian, H. Richard Niebuhr calls the leader of an ecclesial entity "The Pastoral Director," signifying that "the minister has an office [position of authority and service] from which he directs the activities of the

¹⁷Oden, 53 ff.

Church . . .”¹⁸ Niebuhr’s perspective supports the notion that a pastor, a necessary position, is more than just a hired preacher. He or she is placed specifically, with authority, to function as a guide of the affairs of a local congregation.

According to Joseph Hough and John Cobb:

The expectations for leadership in the society as a whole have increasingly been adopted as normative for church leadership as well. Following the general pattern of bureaucratization, the churches, too, have focused on routinized problem solving in the organization and maintenance of their institutions as the chief locus of leadership effectiveness. In other words, the minister as Manager is the strongest candidate for the dominant image of professional leadership.”¹⁹

Hough and Cobb’s comment implies that the church is a context in which leadership is legitimately expected as well because the needs to manage in certain ways. The pastor who can manage a church’s affairs is necessary for the church to progress.

According to the dialogue partners the pastor is necessary as a spiritual guide. This type of leader is symbolic of God’s heart and as one with authority. The pastor is necessary for the progress of a congregation. Oden, in particular argues that there is a distinction between clergy and laity. That difference would suggest that the idea of laity’s managing the church inspired by Christ assumingly via the Scriptures would leave all aspects of church affairs to the individual interpretation of each layperson.

The pastor is placed in a position to lead a congregation with authority in fulfilling the church’s mission. According to leadership pundit Lovett Weems, Jr., “The best thing about authority is that it gives one an opportunity to provide

¹⁸ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 81.

¹⁹ Joseph C. Hough, Jr. and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christian Identity and Theological Education* (Chico: scholars Press, 1985), 78.

leadership.”²⁰ In other words, authority and leadership must complement each other in the form of service. For Weems, what positions a pastor for leadership is when he/she possesses authority, which means that as these two governing roles work in tandem, one’s right to lead is recognized and confirmed by those whom he or she leads. That is to say when the members of RBC realize the pastoral role, theologically, they will concur with God’s reasoning and then claim that they need a pastor and receive this type of leader openly. Concurring with Weems, Oden believes “the shepherd is not without authority . . .”²¹ On that Oden, explains:

The shepherd’s authority is based on competence grounded in mutuality, yet this authority requires accurate empathy to be properly empowered. Pastoral authority is not primarily a coercive authority, such as that of a judge or a policeman, but rather an authority based on covenant fidelity, caring, mutuality, and the expectation of emphatic understanding.²²

According to Niebuhr, “Ministers have derived their immediate authority to preach and teach, lead worship, care for souls, and perform their other offices from the Church and from Scripture.”²³

For an analysis on authority, turning to Dale Rosenberger and his work *Who Are You To Say*, proves insightful. He states, “It is hard for us to imagine a common use of the word authority that’s not pejorative and burdened with negative connotations When we think of authority, we picture raw, acquisitive power seizing and controlling the unwitting . . .”²⁴ Rosenberger is correct in claiming that the term “authority” is intimidating to many and that it has been misused especially

²⁰ Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Church Leadership* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 30.

²¹ Oden, 53.

²² Oden, 53.

²³ Niebuhr, 69.

²⁴ Dale Rosenberger, *Who Are You to Say?* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), 85.

in an ecclesial context where the expectation of trust is a time-honored value. But when authority is nuanced in a holy context, utilized in the effort to lead the people of God, he continues his critique by stating, “Our authority as pastors and church leaders is in direct proportion to our willingness to serve in ways like Jesus, even if only God and not humankind recognizes it.”²⁵ To Rosenberger, authority, expressed rightly, is seen in service, not superior acts by Christian fellows. When we place this form of power in a religious context, we recognize that pastors do have authority in proportion to their willingness to serve. Both pastors and laity must utilize authority with respect to desire to serve like Jesus. To bolster his point, Rosenberger cites Father Henri Nouwen, who asserts: “Compassion must become the core and even the nature of authority.”²⁶ In Nouwen’s perspective, a pastor’s use of authority is not *over* the people but rather *with* the people—executed in balance with the *power* to help people. The pastor is indispensable, in part because “leadership itself is thought to be a service that enables others to use their gifts more effectively for the church and the world,”²⁷ according to Oden.

The use of spiritual gifts, articulated by Paul in his letters to the Romans (Romans 12:6-8), the first letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 12:4-30), and by the writer to the Ephesians (Ephesians 4), is a *mark* of a Christian community, and the usage of such gifts is to strengthen the community, as articulated to the Roman church. To the Corinthians, Paul explained that having such facility notarizes being truly spiritual as persons exercise this endowment for the greater good of the body

²⁵ Rosenberger, 85.

²⁶ Rosenberger, 81.

²⁷ Oden, 54.

of Christ, which functions properly when all gifted persons participate fully. When the spiritually gifted persons act accordingly, the spiritual gifts cultivate the maturity of the body of Christ (Ephesians). Having a pastoral presence is one way in which the laity spiritually mature and can realize fully their potential as communal persons and fellows.

In reference to Hough and Cobb's question that speaks to the purpose of the pastor, which in part is having the vision for the congregation, the authors ask:

"When there is no clear consensus on what the Builder is to build, when it is not clear just what the Master is to teach . . . then what can be said about the purpose of ministry"?²⁸

²⁸ Hough and Cobb, 15.

Chapter 3

Baptist Polity and the Call System in the Case Study Church

Introduction

Christian Ethicist, Edward LeRoy Long, Jr. suggests that “. . . Ecclesial communities are served by polities that are more than procedural directives for maintaining proper order. Polities offer, not only rules for procedure, but models for interaction and fidelity.”²⁹ Long articulates his conviction that there is a lesson in comparing different patterns of polity in contemporary Christianity. His aim in this work is to understand how different ways of governing affairs affect decision-making within Christian groups. He says it may be fruitful to think of polities as languages that facilitate interactions among group members. Ideally, polity can produce and foster togetherness rather than separation or division.

It appears that the founders of the Baptist denomination set policy to distinguish this subdivision in ecumenical circles while seeking to remain faithful to the concept of the New Testament Church. According to Baptist scholars Norman Maring and Winthrop Hudson by setting policy, Baptists were self-discovering. A denomination is a sub-group with its own name that travels in its own direction.

Baptist scholar Professor R. Stanton Norman states:

These early Baptist struggles to define the faith and practice of a ‘true’ church or, as they were fond of saying, a “New Testament church.” As our Baptist ancestors articulated and practice what would become our distinctive theological identity, they were in fact defining what they believed to be a New Testament church. For them, a church founded upon and committed to the teaching of the New Testament was a healthy church. To use our

²⁹ Edward LeRoy Long, Jr., *Patterns of Polity: Varieties of Church Governance* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 152.

vernacular, they wanted to have 'healthy churches.' The result was Baptist churches.³⁰

Norman claims that the Baptist church is modeled after the New Testament church, in a quest to have a *healthy* church.

Another goal of setting policy was to establish and to maintain direct connection with God and to ensure that hearing from God was unimpeded, which means having no human interference, namely bishops with hierarchical authority. With no intermediary with authority, Baptist churches claimed exclusive authority and the right for the congregation to act independently as the final decision-makers in each local church. For instance, when a Baptist church is looking for a new pastor, the call system is a model that allows a local congregation to select a pastor. The call system is the perfect medium through which the laity can exercise their exclusive authority. This allows laity to control the pastoral position so that the person or persons in this position cannot interfere, by design, in any way with their relationship with God and guiding and governing the local church.

This chapter deals with (i) autonomy as a part of denominational polity and (ii) the call system.

Baptist Polity

Baptist polity provides the framework within which the call system can be explored and understood. Baptist policy sets a course of action that produces identity, uniqueness, and distinction. For perspective, Baptist scholars Norman Maring and Winthrop Hudson are helpful in clarifying polity set forth in "ways in which Baptist bodies today maintain fundamental concepts while they seek to

³⁰ R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 6.

balance freedom and order by adapting organizational forms to the fulfillment of mission in a changing environment.”³¹ In their work, they discuss Baptist identity and biblical roots of Baptist doctrine and address alternative structures for church administration, the role of the pastor, and revisions in denominational structure.

Maring and Hudson list some denominational distinctions: (1) private interpretation, (2) the location of authority for decision-making, (3) congregationalism, and (4) the autonomy of the local church.

In regard to the *autonomy of the local church*, they aver:

For some people, the most prized doctrine of Baptists is ‘the autonomy of the local church.’ The notion of absolute independence of a local church, however, was foreign to the thinking of early Baptists. They adopted the congregational principle because they believed that it would afford the possibility of fuller obedience to God, who is the only Lord of the conscience. Especially in local affairs, such as the admission and exclusion of members and the choosing of a pastor; they needed to be free to ascertain and follow the will of the Lord. This right of ‘church power’ represented a degree of independence³²

This freedom, which is autonomy re-described, authorizes Baptist churches to act, particularly in selecting a pastor, in part because of a second distinction—the location of authority for decision-making. This policy permits laity to act independently, even without the advice and direction of ordained pastors in the most important matter of securing a pastor. According to these authors, independence in this form presumably leads laity to believe they are in fuller obedience to the Lord.

³¹ Maring and Hudson, 3.

³² Maring and Hudson, 8.

Convinced that a congregational polity best enables the church to fulfill God's intentions for his people, these Baptist scholars suggest that Baptist polity enables the church to be and do what God expects. The authors explain:

Only as we are sure of our identity as Baptist can we participate responsibly within the larger church and share effectively in its witness to the world. Being clear about the heritage, which we share with other Christian communions, we should also understand and appreciate the inheritance, which we have as Baptists. With a clear conception of the characteristics of Baptist belief and life, we shall be in a better position to know which of these emphases are valid and relevant for today. Out of the integrity produced by greater self-understanding, we can play a more vigorous role within the church and be more articulate in addressing the need of the world.³³

The *heritage* and *inheritance* speak to a consistency spanning succeeding generations that points to the "Baptist way" in Christendom, the immediate environment of every local Baptist church, and to a larger extent, the world. Now every Baptist congregation is permitted to interpret differently policy, specifically autonomy, in its own context.

Baptist polity emphasizes autonomy, to empower the local church to hear and relate to God directly, unimpeded by any human intermediary, in particular, a bishop in pastoral form. This emphasis raises the question of the location of the authority and how it functions within the church.

R. Stanton Norman's work, *The Baptist Way* is a declaration restating the Baptist distinctions but with a contemporary perspective. He clarifies some theological perspectives of Baptist identity, namely biblical authority, the Lordship of Christ, church discipline, religious freedom and, of particular concern for this work, congregational polity. Norman states that there are three major expressions

³³ Maring and Hudson, 3.

of church polity that exist within Christendom: (1) Episcopal, (2) Presbyterian, and (3) Congregational. The Episcopal form of polity locates authority for decision-making with a bishop. The Presbyterian form allows the decision-making tasks to lie with particular elders. Finally, the congregational form of church governance “emphasizes the autonomy, independence, and authority of the local church. The ultimate authority for decision-making resides within the gathered congregation.”³⁴ Norman explains, “Congregational polity may be defined as ‘that form of church governance in which final human authority rests with the local or particular congregation when it gathers for decision-making.’”³⁵ He continues with this:

The intention of congregational polity is that the congregation governs itself under the lordship of Jesus Christ and the lordship of the Holy Spirit, under the delegated authority of pastors and deacons, but with no governing ecclesial bodies exerting authority over the church. All members participate in the decision-making process. The congregational polity of a church embodies democratic process, is responsible to the lordship of Jesus Christ, and is guided by his authoritative word, the inerrant Scriptures.³⁶

Norman is making a case for congregational form of church government. He claims this form has legacy from the Baptist founders and is based on the notion of the priesthood of all believers understood from Paul’s writings in the New Testament. The priesthood of all believers provides the basis for authority to be granted to laity to make decisions in the church by sharing this responsibility. The perception of the priesthood of all believers is used to suggest equality for the body of Christ, pertaining to authority without consideration that all members of the body of Christ may not be spiritually mature enough to share in leadership

³⁴ Norman, 86.

³⁵ Norman, 86.

³⁶ Norman, 86ff.

responsibilities. Ideally, congregational polity is a manifestation of democracy in Baptist churches. The laity participates in the decision-making process as ones with the final say on all church matters. One method that this notion of the priesthood of all believers is manifest is in the selection and election of a pastor.

Chapter 4 in Maring and Hudson's work focuses on the local church. They discuss polity questions and the powers of the local church. They ask, "Since the New Testament does not prescribe a detailed polity for a local church, how do we decide what organizational forms are best suited to the use of the church? It is evident that early Christian communities adapted their organizational life to meet existing circumstances."³⁷ With this adaptation to one's milieu, the authors raise an important question as to where authority is vested for making decisions. One answer to this important question reveals why the call system serves as the ideal practice for the Baptist denomination.

The Call System

According to Baptist scholar, Everett C. Goodwin, the call system, descriptively, is "A pastor is placed over the church by the calling of God and by the free and voluntary consent of the congregations."³⁸ In the spirit of Baptist scholar, Edward Hiscox's work *The Hiscox Guide for Baptist Churches*, which is a primary source for Baptist polity; Goodwin's work maintains a central component of Hiscox's thinking, which is the independence and autonomy of the local Baptist Church. Goodwin's new version of Hiscox's "classic" text is to ensure the relevancy of

³⁷ Maring and Hudson, 50.

³⁸ Everett C. Goodwin, *The New Hiscox Guide for Baptist Churches* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1995), 73.

Hiscox's work in the modern era. Like Hiscox's original thought, Goodwin's work is a modern version that addresses some societal and ecclesial changes. But Goodwin maintains that his work is still an exhaustive guide for Baptist churches in a modern world.

The call system is an illustration of the free, authoritative and voluntary consent of Baptist congregations whose goal it is to find, select and elect a pastor. Baptists approve or disapprove all matters via voting, which is the principal element of this system. The counterpart of the call system is the appointment system, which functions differently in that the voluntary consent of the congregants is not the main factor in decision-making. The appointment system operates in denominations that have the episcopacy. The jurisdictional bishops are responsible for naming the pastor of a local congregation in its denomination. In this system, the congregants/denominational adherents believe that the bishop is the authority as the Episcopal leader with discretion to administer the temporal affairs of the church. Therefore, whatever direction the bishop takes regarding the pastoral choice and consequential assignment is generally viewed as authoritative in the bishops' role of providing spiritual leadership of the church.

The call system reflects a Baptist church's independence. This system operates in the Baptist denominational structure because it is policy to have no intermediary in human form, namely a bishop, so that Baptists' may hear from the Lord directly. Hiscox, and his work *The Hiscox Guide for Baptist Churches*, is a primary source for Baptist polity. It is presented in manual style for Baptist churches and offers policies and practices that are uniquely Baptist so that

adherents may consistently follow the “Baptist way.” In chapter 3 of his manual, “The Christian Ministry,” he states that the need and function of the pastor in a Baptist church is, “To shepherd the flock, to instruct congregations in religious truth, and to guide the churches as to internal order and the practice activities of Christian life. But, to be more specific, it may be said the ministerial purpose is twofold: the conversion of men [and women], and then their instruction and upbuilding in the faith of the gospel.”³⁹

Moving into a pastoral position and carrying out these pastoral duties in a Baptist church is done via the call system. Hiscox explains:

Churches secure their pastors by election, as the free choice of the people, in each individual church. It is an essential part of the independence of the churches, the right to choose their pastors No individual or combination of men can appoint pastors over them, nor compel a church to accept as officers those whom they have not chosen. This is the policy of the New Testament, and has even been the usage of our people. A free people demand and maintain the right to choose their own rulers. The selection and election of a pastor is one of the most important acts—if not the most important—pertaining to the independence of the church. The interest of the body and the welfare of religion depend so largely on it⁴⁰

Hiscox’s explanation is a supportive statement for the call system and in opposition to the appointment system. Essentially, the call system is the ideal expression of the freedom of Baptists who believe they are being consistent with the New Testament scriptures. The call system is the perfect medium through which the selection and election of a pastor (and potential to remove a pastor at will by deselection) is possible so that Baptists can maintain freedom and independence. That independence, exhibited in part by intentionally having no hierarchical or

³⁹ Edward T. Hiscox, *The Hiscox Guide for Baptist Churches* (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1964), 47.

⁴⁰ Hiscox, 55ff.

adjacent accountability, namely in bishop form, and autonomy, which gives potentiality to authority becoming unilateral, and on that basis warrants a rethinking of the call system.

After experiencing the candidacy process at RBC my perspective on an official call from a Baptist congregation to be the pastor changed meaningfully. At the time of my candidacy, Deacon Clyde, who was the Chair of Pastors' Search Committee claimed that I was RBC's choice based upon their prayers—which God had answered by sending me—but the congregation needed to vote. That is to say that the pastorate at RBC depended on the opinion of the congregants—obviously not totally on divine direction. Prior to and amid the candidacy process at RBC, I was unaware of the process of how Baptist churches secured a new pastor, but through that experience at RBC, I can conclude that it is a process that allows the laity to dominate the process. Therefore, Hiscox's statement above regarding the local church's right to make the pastoral choice based on the New Testament warrants investigation.

In reference to Jeremiah 3:15, biblical commentator, Ralph Earle, states that "these [shepherds] shall be according to God's own heart; they shall be of His own choosing and shall be qualified by himself."⁴¹ Earle's observation recognizes that recipients of God's shepherds are persons who realize that God designed this type of leadership; therefore, pastors are given and sent by God and not necessarily, arbitrarily or idiosyncratically selected by people. The connection of pastor to people biblically has God involved in the process, because God is Shepherd (Psalm

⁴¹ Ralph Earle, Jr. *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), 615.

23:1) and Jesus is the “Good Shepherd” (John 10), and as this work will show, God maintains involvement through the apostles, whom Jesus sends to the people of God.

If the Baptist denomination is consistent with the Bible, as all the Baptist scholars cited in this work claim, then Baptists must concede that at some point in the process of this most important act of choosing a pastor, their choice of this type of leader must be assuredly inspired by the Spirit. This is a proven way Christians can recognize that this is God’s choice, as God maintains connection with God’s people. For the pastor and people relationship to commence and function, the congregation in need of a pastor must be open to the Holy Spirit of God who inspires, teaches, and guides the human vessels. Additionally, the congregation must realize that the pastor God connects with people comes with qualifications and authority all the while adjusting to the milieu in which he or she is serving. When this concession occurs, the call system is unnecessary.

In the fourth chapter in Maring and Hudson’s work, in a subtitle, “Powers of a Local Church,” they explain how Baptists name their pastors. The authors claim:

Baptist have maintained that Christ has given local churches ‘all that power and authority which is in any way needful for their carrying on that order in worship and discipline which he hath instituted for them to observe.’ This was also the teaching of the Protestant Reformers. Martin Luther, for example declared that ‘a little group of pious Christian laymen’ who had been ‘taken captive and set down in a wilderness’ could constitute themselves a church and choose one of their number to preach Luther was insisting that the basic constituent element of a church is a faithful people and not any outward institutional succession. He was also insisting that, since all the faithful are priests, they may designate the person who is to act on their behalf as pastor. If these two contentions are true, there is no need for a

company of Christian people to derive spiritual authority from any other source than Christ himself.⁴²

The presupposition in Maring and Hudson's thought is that the "faithful people" are spiritually mature enough to govern properly. Now with this right to select and elect, they can officially assign someone to serve as the pastor. In theory, this is good, but at RBC the congregants continue the practice of voting without comprehending this practice and why it's used in conducting church affairs. If the congregants who selected me to be the pastor were "faithful people," spiritually mature, and a "company of Christians," then they would not have needed to vote, because if they truly heard from God to call me, then they would have understood "spiritual authority" directly from God and would have received me as their pastor without the vote. As such, the vote was the final authority, and not necessarily spiritual.

I spoke with Regina Henderson, former pastor of the Harry Hosier United Methodist Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and she explained why she prefers the appointment system. She has been a part of the UMC all her life and has been a pastor since 1997. When asked why she believes the appointment system works in the UMC, she replied, "The congregants respect the authority of the bishop. And they believe that that authority comes from God. So when the bishop assigns a pastor, the congregants know that it was a communal choice involving the bishop, district superintendent, and the local congregation."⁴³ I then asked what she deemed to be the positives aspects of the appointment system. She said:

⁴² Maring and Hudson, 52ff.

⁴³ Henderson, Regina. Telephone conversation with the author, November 12, 2010.

When it comes to my functioning as a pastor in an assignment, I take comfort in knowing that the bishop has the final say on my position, not the congregation or possibly a deacon. If difficulty arises between the laity and me, I can appeal to authorities beyond the congregation—who may be the source of the problem. Unlike my friends who are pastors in Baptist congregations, if the congregation becomes disgruntled with him or her, the pastor has no one to appeal to. They're at the mercy, so to speak, of the congregants. I take comfort in knowing that our denomination provides an objective, not subjective support system. And knowing that, it allows me to be more prophetic in my preaching and progressive in my ministry. I know the system will back me.

The interview concluded with Henderson saying, "I could not function, rightly with freedom, in a structure where the power of my job rests in the pew . . . with people who make judgments based upon whether or not they like me. I would be too afraid to make administrative moves in fear that they would rebel and, ultimately, that would mean the loss of my job. Therefore, in my opinion, the call system isn't secure."

In part, the call system is based on secular political theory. Persons in the sacred space adopted the system's methods in an effort to bring order to decision-making. Baptists utilize some elements of parliamentary procedure to function as both an autonomous and democratic organization. The call system can function in the Baptist denomination because polity dictates that authority belongs to the congregation.

Procedurally, RBC will only call a pastor if the congregation consents. Maring and Hudson's premise that *faithful people* are *priests* and can utilize authority because they have these dynamic tools for leadership is good in theory. RBC realized the dynamics of their authority when RBC used the same power, now unilateral authority, to eject me as their pastor. The same authority to select and

elect a pastor is used to deselect a pastor at will. It is possible that RBC called me to be its pastor at the age of thirty, with no pastoral experience, and thus the influential members thought it would be opportune to control me in the pastoral position foreknowing that the system empowers its authority to deselect me at will if the influential members were displeased with me. A statement made by one senior member about me immediately after I was voted in illustrates this mentality: "He's young. We can whip him into shape." In other words, the congregation knows it has the authority to force me into the pastoral mold it wanted.

Maring and Hudson's thought that a pastoral decision can be made solely because the Baptist congregants are faithful people who have authority is theoretical. When laity possesses dynamic tools for leadership such as authority without a spiritual comprehension of authority's potential the opportunity to misuse these tools arises, and persons in the midst of that environment can become wounded, the Christian community can be damaged and, consequently, the people are traumatized. It wounded many people and me.

The call system generates three theological questions: (1) how is God involved in this process, if at all? (2) Is this action of *calling* congruent with a biblical paradigm? (3) Does this system disregard pastoral purpose and therefore supplant pastoral authorization and leadership? Maring and Hudson assert, "Discerning the leading of the Spirit takes time and sensitivity, and a group may fail to reach agreement and have to follow majority decisions. In a practical sense, therefore, a church is a spiritual democracy in which all may express their

judgments.”⁴⁴ This congregational form of church government, in their view is “. . . an assembly of committed Christians that could be ‘a sensitive and delicate instrument,’ which could be led by the Holy Spirit to discover God’s will.”⁴⁵ The authors promote practicing democracy. They inject the idea of God’s presence by using the term “spiritual,” but the point to prove is the laity has the ability to make decisions, democratically, in a spiritual context. In this view, God’s presence is not an absolute certainty or in fact a necessity.

Based upon Maring and Hudson’s statement regarding having options in reaching an agreement, which are being led by the Holy Spirit or majority ruling by congregational judgment, they believe that it is possible for the laity to make decisions that are in their best interest as it pertains to the congregation, democratically. With the inclusion and permissibility of consensus, the authors claim the laity is authorized to act as the final decision-makers if the laity does not sense a clear direction and decision from the Spirit. If having to make the final decision because the laity has not discerned the Spirit’s leading, the laity realizes in this denominational system they have the power to make the pastoral choice.

The call system is fitting because it is democratic. The laity makes the final decisions by voting on all matters, namely, the selection of a pastor. Baptist polity, namely autonomy, permits self-rule to a congregation and this may lead to an abuse of power by the laity in the matters of electing, rejecting and/or deselecting a pastor. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the call system reflects Baptist

⁴⁴ Maring and Hudson, 54ff.

⁴⁵ Maring and Hudson, 54.

ideals, which are an ethos of independence, free will, and the right to select and elect a pastor.

Chapter 4

Case Study: Rural Baptist Church

Perspective of Rural Baptist Church

My pastorate began at RBC in January 1997. At that time, RBC was a 109 year-old, all-Black congregation. The senior members lived with the harsh realities of racism and found refuge in a culturally homogenous congregation. For the founding members of RBC organizing a church meant having and controlling a space that ensured that faceless and dehumanized peoples would once again become “somebody” in American society. RBC is an important entity not only as a sacred space for theological perspectives, but also as a social space for racial and human empowerment.

RBC was organized in 1887. The church is located, geographically in southern Virginia, in Pittsylvania County outside the city of Danville. According to the 2000 Census Bureau, the racial makeup of the county was 53.86% White, 44.11% Black. Danville/Pittsylvania County is predominately White and Black. In both the city and county, the population was spread out with 23.3 % under the age of 18, 8% from 18 to 24, 25.6% from 45 to 64, and 19.6% who were 65 years of age or older. The medium age was 40.

At the beginning of my pastorate, most of the congregants at RBC were between the ages of sixty and ninety, and some of those had been sharecroppers and domestic workers. The majority of the members were manual laborers working in plants and factories in the surrounding areas. Since RBC's existence, most of those years were without a fulltime pastor. Every Sunday RBC met for Sunday School, but

on the fourth Sunday of every month RBC also had a worship service wherein the preacher would come and deliver the sermon, but had no power and authority over administrative matters. The members of RBC are accustomed to being the final decision-makers and the responsible party for the church and its affairs due to not having a pastor. The preacher that came to RBC to deliver the sermon also circulated in the same geographical area to different churches again only delivering the sermon. Interestingly, the laity of RBC called this itinerant preacher their *pastor* because he was a “reverend” and he delivered the sermon. After some consideration to be full time, RBC called its first pastor in 1970. To the congregants, that meant hiring someone to preach every Sunday. However, even though they hired a fulltime pastor, the laity continued to manage all church affairs, deliberately.

RBC’s understanding of a pastor is one who has accepted his or her call to preach and has been ordained by a congregation—able to preach sermons, officiate at weddings and funerals, and who can moderate the business meetings. The administration of the church and leadership, however, are the congregation’s responsibility. Those administrative responsibilities include the handling of all church finances, building(s) maintenance, maintaining church property, e.g. church van, setting church policy, and hiring and firing all church personnel.

This standard way of thinking about a pastor and the pastoral position became evident during a verbal exchange I had with one of the female senior members. While pointing her finger at me, she said, “This is my church! I was born here! We hired you!” This statement, along with others mentioned previously, reveals a mentality that lacks understanding of the Church and of Christian

community's being a shared space of mutuality and support, otherness as opposed to individualism, and the purpose of spiritual gifting, which is to strengthen the body of Christ. The body of Christ is designed to function communally.

Unfortunately, authentic community is threatened when certain Christians express unilateral authority in a communal space.

Unresolved issues also threaten Christian community. Toward the end of my pastorate I realized that one unsettled issue within RBC was conflict, which existed between some of the disgruntled members and me. Without a sincere effort at conflict resolution, the disagreements created irreparable damage, which was only seemingly settled by ejecting me from the pastoral position. The conflict started six weeks into my pastorate and it was never truly addressed and settled in seven years.

A Church Consultant, Speed Leas says that he has never been in a church that has a decent set of understandings of how to deal with differences when they arise."⁴⁶ I recognize that RBC was unprepared to deal with conflict and as result I was ejected. If the disgruntled congregants had taken my advice, which was to invite in an expert on conflict resolution, then the conflict would have been at least addressed properly and possibly settled amicably. Instead it intensified and some members thought, uncritically that the only resolution was to oust me. Christian Counselor, Henry A. Virkler suggests in his exhaustive work, entitled *Choosing A New Pastor: The Complete Handbook*, particularly in chapter 10, labeled, "What to

⁴⁶ Taken from Henry A. Virkler, *Choosing A New Pastor: The Complete Handbook* (Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1992). Virkler takes the quote from Leas work, *Moving Your Church Through Conflict* (Washington: Alban Institute, 1985), 12.

do When Conflict Develops” in a subsection labeled, “Why Are Pastors’ Fired?” he suggests four reasons: (1) a congregational history of firing pastors, (2) factions, intra-church, often going back for many years, (3) disapproval by a powerful minority of any person (including the pastor) who attempted to broaden the decision-making power base of the congregation, and (4) a history of unwillingness to identify problems when they were small and work on them.⁴⁷ All of these reasons were apparent at RBC.

With regard to Virkler’s first reason as to why pastors are fired, it is noteworthy that RBC has had a congregational history of unfavorable relations with most of their pastors. Although I was the only pastor terminated, multiple other pastors serving RBC, before and after my tenure, resigned after learning that they were in jeopardy of being voted out or ejected. RBC has had five fulltime pastors since 1970, and of that number four have resigned since 1990. The first fulltime pastor, Reverend Brown, was selected and elected to the pastorate in 1970. He ultimately stepped down out of frustration because he learned that he was about to be fired due to congregational conflict. Reverend Brown’s successor was Reverend White. His tenure lasted for six years, and he resigned abruptly because he also learned that he was about to be fired due to congregational conflict. I succeeded Reverend White. The only reason that I was ejected is because I refused to resign at the behest of Deacon Clyde. When Deacon Clyde realized that I was not going to resign, he exercised unilateral authority and fulfilled his statement, which again was I will get you out of this church if it’s the last thing I do. Following my pastorate,

⁴⁷ Virkler, 193.

RBC called and voted in Reverend Green. His tenure lasted for three years. He resigned during a worship service on a Sunday immediately after ending his sermon. He said to the congregation from the pulpit, "This was my last sermon at this church. I quit!" What appears to be a power struggle between some of the influential members and officers of RBC and most of their pastors in recent history corroborates Virkler's claim that pastors are fired because of a history of doing so, and a disapproval by a powerful minority of any person who attempted to broaden the decision-making power base of the congregation.

The Black Church and Rural Baptist Church

The authors of *Black Church Studies* compile data on the African and African-American religious culture and analyze it in a way that allows readers to comprehend the importance of these religious experiences. They successfully oscillate between the academy and society, explaining why both necessitate the *Black Church* presence. They assert that faith is the nexus between the perceptions of God, as Liberator, and the hostile and horrific world in which African-Americans were forced to subsist, and Christianity expressed in particular by means of the Baptist denomination was crucial to the rediscovery of the Black soul, self, and personhood in America. The authors of *Black Church Studies* state,

African-Americans came to Christianity not simply through the church but through a faith in the God of love and liberation. From slavery to freedom, Black Christians have historically upheld the cross of Jesus because it affirmed their humanity in a world that sought to deny the equality of all God's children. This history reflects that Black Christians' faith in God's love and liberating power led to the establishment of the institution and tradition known as the Black Church.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Juan Floyd-Thomas, Carol B. Duncan, Stephen G. Ray, Jr. and Nancy Lynne Westfield, *Black Church Studies* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 3.

African-Americans in chattel slavery became attracted to Baptist theology because the theological perspectives of this denomination afforded them, in particular, the notion of the freedom of the soul although the physical body was enslaved against their will. The indentured slaves embraced this theological perspective as an ideology of independence, autonomy, freedom, liberation, and authority. This connection to Christianity came through a unique conversion experience, eloquently expressed by Mechal Sobel, in his book *Trabellin' On*, which describes 'trabbel' or 'trabelin' in the hard Christian journey, and the revival of the soul of the African slave. Sobel writes, "The central thesis [is] . . . that Africans brought their world views into North America where, in an early phase of slavery, the core understanding or Sacred Cosmos, at the heart of these world views coalesced into one new African consciousness—basically similar yet already significantly different from West African understandings."⁴⁹ The Sacred Cosmos, as he calls it, is the prevailing worldview that the Africans brought with them.

Sobel makes a case that the *Black Church* was born out of an effort to discover/rediscover spiritual meaning after the African Sacred Cosmos was diluted.

He writes:

In recognizing his own internal and external worth, the black knew himself both in a new way and in an ancient way. The Baptist rebirth experience served as the catalyst to bring him in contact with his African soul: to again know it, to pay it proper respect, and to keep it alive. The 'little me' did not die, but it was reborn, and it was the Great God, whom he had not known personally in Africa, that brought him back to his African heritage. This was the crucial act of integration. Out of this act emerged a new Sacred Cosmos, a new creation.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979), xvii.

⁵⁰ Sobel, 113.

This dual knowing finds expression in the Christian faith and the Baptist tradition in particular, which in addition to experience brought “new life” via the baptism experience and consequently a rebirth into a new community. African-American Christians, in the Baptist tradition, now as the *new Afro-Baptist Sacred Cosmos*, meant being reborn. In Sobel’s thinking, the Baptist denomination was more appealing to the African slaves at the time of conversion because, “They had to retell their spirit travels and symbolize their death and rebirth in ‘drowning’ and yet live again.”⁵¹ It was through this experience that the knowledge of God was in them, and thus the enslaved and dehumanized being was reborn in Jesus Christ. Baptism was the medium through which new life happened. The Baptist denomination afforded African-Americans a sense of control of their lives, which was vital to reclaiming their sense of personhood, aliveness, and humanity. Said differently, the authors of *Black Church Studies* claim that emancipated Blacks were attracted to the Methodist and Baptist denominations in particular because “these denominations tended to be more autonomous and less subject to outside control.”⁵²

In the work of both Sobel and the authors of *Black Church Studies*, there is the recognition that the *Black Church* is the matrix of the rebirth, freedom, and liberation of the soul. In view of both perspectives, Blacks in succeeding generations have a positive legacy of believing that they can make decisions that inform their faith and determine their destiny. Critically, the *Black Church* is a life-giving source that helps Blacks locate their faith in a Christian community and live out the

⁵¹ Sobel, 139.

⁵² Floyd-Thomas, 21.

narrative of strength, endurance, and struggle. For members of the *Black Church* what makes this religious entity attractive is it gives a measure of independence to realize God's love and liberating power. Authority, which is one main component of the *Black Church*, is the potential to find and embrace a new sense of self and personhood.

The Candidacy Process in the Call System

As previously stated, the laity of Baptist churches has the power and responsibility to select, elect and deselect a pastor via a vote at will as an autonomous entity. The importance of the voting practice at RBC was revealed during a conversation I had with the deacons in the first month of my pastorate. We met at the church to discuss the Lord's Supper. We began to talk about church membership, and that led to my question regarding voting in the church. For instance, during the invitation to discipleship (or opening the doors of the church as its phrased at RBC), if a person desires to join the church, the deacons must first put that to a vote. During my first service, after the invitation to discipleship, a woman came to the front the church intending to join, and a deacon stood and said, "This sister wishes to join our church. Is there a motion to receive her as a new member?" Then a member stood and said, "Brother deacon, I make a motion to receive her as a new member of RBC." Then the deacon asked for a second, and another member stood and seconded the motion. Then the deacon said, "there has been a motion, and it has been properly seconded, are you ready for the question? All who are in favor of this lady joining our church signify by saying aye, and all not in favor, signify by saying nay." After the deacon realized that there were no naysayers, he

concluded by saying, "The ayes have it. Motion carried." Based on that vote, the woman was accepted as a new member of RBC. I asked the deacons why the church votes and how this practice became the method for all decision-making. A deacon, in his late sixties, who had been a member of RBC his entire life and is a second-generation member said, "I don't know. We don't know. We've always done it. My father was a deacon here, and he did it, too."

In a different meeting with the deacons, I discussed the practice of voting on new members and the possible negative effects it could have on the psyche and spirit of a human being seeking the unconditional love of God, God's grace, forgiveness, mercy, and life-changing transforming power, found in the local church. If a person is disallowed, or in stronger terms rejected from a church via a vote, the Deacons must consider the consequences to the psyche and heart of that person. As such, I asked the deacons what they would do if the congregation rejected a person's membership via a vote. One deacon replied, "We have never thought about that." The members of RBC are using voting as a method of decision-making unaware of its history and function but believe it to be the best way of deciding matters.

The call system at RBC, historically, there has been approximately nine steps to the call system at RBC. Each step, ideally, is to realize the presence and *moving* of God in the endeavor of selecting the *right* person for the pastorate.

Step one: *Compose a Pastors' Search Committee*. The deacons meet with the congregation and declare it is time to begin to look for a new pastor. This committee usually reflects the demographics of the congregation to ensure that all ages are represented on the committee. The key in the first step is establishing and

agreeing upon the process—the plan of how to find the pastor. For example, the committee must consider and answer one important question: Will the committee present multiple candidates or a single candidate to the congregation for a final vote? If the committee presents multiple candidates there is the potential for discord, discontentment, competition and disillusionment when the outcome is announced. The opportunity to vote enables each member to participate in the process of finding and securing a pastor whom they may approve of, and if their choice is not confirmed, they may leave the church.

Step two: *Create the pastoral profile*. Ideally, the committee makes a sketch of what type of pastor they would like to select to serve the congregation. However, in many cases, the Pastors' Search Committee will look for a pastor who is either like or dislike the former pastor, typically, because the knowledge and understanding of a pastor is not based upon a biblical idea of a pastoral theology but rather an empirical knowledge of a pastor. In some cases, when a pastor(s) has wounded a congregation, the committee will be determined to include or exclude someone based on its experience with the previous pastor(s). As such, the pastoral profile is based primarily on personal experience and not necessarily on a spiritual awareness and a functioning pastoral theology.

Step three: *Publicize the pastoral vacancy*. Once the pastoral profile is complete, the Pastors' Search Committee begins its search locally, regionally, nationally, and in some rare cases, internationally. Having a pastors' profile ensures that the church will try to select the *ideal* pastor. Typically, the committee places an advertisement in a local and/or national faith-based publication.

Step four: *Receive and review resumes.* The Pastors' Search Committee is responsible to read and review resumes when looking for a potential pastoral candidate(s). The desired criteria usually include pastoral experience (at least five years), and in some cases, but not mandated, a college degree and a theological degree.⁵³

Step five: *Interview potential candidates.* When the potential candidates are identified, they are granted an individual interview conducted by the Pastors' Search Committee. The questions typically focus on the image RBC wants to portray through its pastor. In the interview, the committee asks the questions to see whether the answers match its ideal pastors' profile.⁵⁴ If after the first round of interviews, the committee has not found an acceptable candidate then the committee returns to step four and reopens the search. Typically, the committee sets a timeline for the search and selection, but if it does not see any potential candidates from the field selected to interview, the process will require more time to seek additional applicants.

Step six: *Choose a candidate.* This chosen person is being seriously considered for section and election to the pastorate. In many cases, a background check is done and sometimes, a credit-check as well.⁵⁵

⁵³ RBC does not recognize females as potential candidates for the pastorate. The congregants do, however believe that God calls women to preach, but RBC will only consider a male candidate who is married and can be presented as a family man.

⁵⁴ In my case, RBC was looking for a young pastor to attract younger members because the congregation was mostly seniors and they were concerned about the survival of their church. By seriously considering me at thirty years old, the committee was hopeful that I would attract youth and young adults, and those people would have families and/or start families, which would ensure the church's growth and survival.

⁵⁵ With regard to the process of the pastoral search, RBC decided that it would present only one candidate to the congregation at a time for a vote. The church believed that it was unwise to present

Step seven: *Present the candidate to the congregation for a vote.* RBC's bylaws set the requirements for members to vote on selecting a pastor. If the candidate is approved by a majority vote he is the new pastor-elect. If the candidate does not win the vote, then the congregation asks the committee to return to steps four through six and possibly back to step three. The pastor-elect designation signifies that the candidate won the vote but now must be installed by the church to make the call official.

Step eight: *Install the Pastor-Elect.* The installation service is a ceremony in which the congregation establishes the elected pastor into office as pastor. The service typically includes *charges*, which means entrusting the new pastor-elect with pastoral duties such as the ministries of preaching, pastoral care, and teaching, pastoral counseling, officiating weddings and funerals, and some administration. The pastor is presented with a Bible, signifying that he will preach the word of God, along with a set of keys, signifying that he has *access* to the church. Usually, the pastor of the pastor-elect delivers the sermon and then charges the pastor-elect to specifically perform pastoral duties.

My Candidacy at Rural Baptist Church

While I was studying at Duke Divinity School, one of my professors, Dr. William C. Turner, Jr., convinced me to experience the candidacy process in a Baptist

multiple candidates because doing so could possibly divide the congregation should some members not get their specific pastoral choice. When I was chosen as the candidate, I was invited back for a second interview in November 1996. During that meeting, I was asked what my vision was for the church and several other questions pertaining to the church's history.

church.⁵⁶ As I was approaching graduation, I told him about the pastoral vacancy at RBC. I expressed some hesitancy about submitting my resume, to which Dr. Turner said, “You should go through the process for the experience.”

After submitting my resume to RBC, I was granted an interview in September 1996 and then I was invited back for a second interview in November 1996, which was a two-day process. The second interview would culminate in a vote by the members. The invitation for a second interview meant that I was an official candidate for the pastoral position, and that in order to become the pastor of RBC the congregation had to vote on it. The church confirmed my call as pastor by a vote of 95 to 5 that occurred on Sunday, December 1, 1997.

RBC’s perspective and understanding of a pastor and the pastoral role is based upon a particular pastor who served in that position for seventeen years, Reverend Brown, who was very involved with a local Baptist church association, a state Baptist convention and an international missions convention. As a result, one aspect of the pastor’s profile during my candidacy was that the committee sought a pastor to continue what Reverend Brown had started, which had become tradition for a pastor of RBC. The committee thinks that that is what a pastor should be and do—engage in convention and association work. In fact, during my first interview, I was asked what I thought about church conventions and associations and whether I wanted to be involved and, if so, to what extent.

⁵⁶ Dr. Willie C. Turner, Ph.D., is a Professor of the Practice of Homiletics at Duke University, The Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina. He also serves as the senior pastor of the Mt. Level Baptist Church in Durham.

I experienced another interesting matter in the first interview that informed RBC's perspective of a pastor in their pastor's profile. I was asked what was my view on female preachers, and did I think that God calls females to preach and be pastors. The interview questions lead me to believe that its image of a pastor comes from its personal, empirical knowledge. If the last pastoral experience was a good, the members want another pastor similar to that one to continue doing what that *good* pastor did. In that process, the vision of whom and what God desires for that congregation has little or no room for consideration. There is no direct evidence in RBC's process of finding a pastor that God's vision was considered for who will lead the congregation forward—and not in a direction that is primarily based on the church's past. If the experience(s) was bad, giving the committee a negative framework from which to work, then the objective of the search is to find whom it *does not* want instead of whom it needs.

After serving for seven years, I was ejected from my pastoral position on Monday, March 15, 2004 by twenty-three of the 300 members. That unsanctioned group of twenty-three members was composed of some prominent members of the congregation. For instance, the finance clerk, the chair of the deacons, along with other deacons, the budget chairperson, a trustee, and the treasurer. These persons just happened to total twenty-three and were in disagreement with me on state of affairs of RBC. This group led my dismissal from the pastorate at RBC unilaterally without the consent of the membership, which was a breach of the bylaws. The bylaws state that the choosing of a pastor has to be done via vote by the congregation, and if the pastor is to be removed it has to be put to a vote as well.

When I asked Deacon Clyde about my being ejected, he said, "Ain't going to be no vote. We decided." This writer, along with many of the members of RBC experienced the exercise of abusive power after being ejected from the pastoral position by some of the members who acted unilaterally. The principle person in this confrontation was Deacon Clyde. He said to me, "I'm going to get you out of this church if it's the last thing I do." Deacon Clyde told me that I was being fired because of unresolved conflict between some of the members and me, and that some of the influential members considered me to be the *problem* as to why the church was not growing, and why a small number of members left the congregation. I was ejected in that unlawful manner because that discontented group knew that if my pastorate had been put to a vote as it was supposed to be based upon RBC's bylaws, I would not have been voted out.

In events leading up to my dismissal, starting October 2003 Deacon Clyde and I were meeting in my office discussing church affairs. During the conversation he gave me an envelope. After opening it I saw what appeared to be an official court order barring me from the property. I asked him did the church tell you to do this and he said, "No! I'm doing this!" He continued saying, "You have to go! If it's the last thing I do, I will get you out of this church!" After learning that the document was fraudulent I called an emergency meeting the following evening, which was on a Wednesday inclusive the associate ministers, all the officers, deacons and trustees, and some other lay-members to officially inform them what Deacon Clyde did. After everyone voiced their thoughts, and it was agreed that he was wrong and the

attendees asked him to apologize. He did. The conflict seemed to be settled, but it was not.

The conflict came to its peak on March 15, 2004. I called a regular meeting with officers and associate ministers. After going through my agenda and discussing the future of RBC, Deacon Clyde said, "We still have problems." I asked him what he thought the problems were, and he said, "You." He then said, "I think you should resign for the betterment of the church." After telling him that I was not going to resign, he handed me a letter and said, "Well then, you're fired! Get out! And if you're not off this property in thirty minutes, we will call the police." In unison, his supporters got up from the table and convened in a side office. I was still seated along with some deacons and two associate ministers. A deputy sheriff arrived, and after ascertaining the situation, he asked to speak with me in my office. He suggested that I leave the premises for my safety and to defuse any possible unpleasant incident. Taking the deputy's advice, I packed my office and drove away. That night twenty-three people ejected me. I realized then who has the authority at RBC.

Analysis

A psychosocial dynamic must be considered in the use and defense of the call system. The effects of racism, discrimination, and domination are embedded deeply in the psyches and hearts of many of the members of RBC. For reasons aforementioned, the ages of most of the members of RBC places them in the context of racial discrimination of Jim and Jane Crow and exclusive social spaces consequently local Black churches became a hub of not only sacred activity but

social interests as well. *The Black Church* is a place where dehumanized individuals can become “somebody”. This is accomplished, in part, by holding a certain office in the church, which wields power, authority and influence. From that vantage point power and authority are dynamic tools to defend personhood and position in that space. Blacks were attracted to the Baptist denomination because it presented a freedom of the soul by being *born again*, theologically and this perception of freedom came with a sense authority over ones new life.

In review of the process of my candidacy, the practice of voting is most outstanding. During my second interview, and prior to my interview sermon, while conversing with the chair of the Pastors’ Search Committee, Deacon Clyde said to me, “We prayed for a pastor, and God answered our prayers, and I believe God sent you to us to be our next pastor. We have heard from God.” Based on his claim, I presumed that God was guiding and influencing the entire process, but what Deacon Clyde said next caused me to doubt. He stated, “But there is one more step in the process. We have to vote.” The significance of this statement is the authority of a Baptist congregation, expressed in the candidacy process of the call system, and voting.

Deacon Clyde’s statements raise three important questions. One, if God is present, guiding, revealing and influencing, and the pastoral search chairman or the search committee was truly convinced that God said I was to be their next pastor, why was a vote necessary? Two, if I had lost the vote, what would Deacon Clyde have said to me? If I had lost the vote, according to RBC’s bylaws, I would not have become the next pastor. And three, in the candidacy process, does God or the

membership possess the authority to be decision-makers, and how do Baptist congregations understand authority theologically?

Virkler believes that God does not promise to guide every moral decision that individuals make. Therefore, God who does not have a perfect plan for every individual's life and thus accepts the decisions of people. He believes that people can decide what's best and based on what he calls *sanctified wisdom*. He says with reference to his work offering advice on how to choose a pastor, "[My] view of decision making is compatible with the procedures recommended in the following chapters. By doing a self-study, by developing a pastor profile, by researching a pastor's gifts and expectations and comparing them with the needs and expectations of our congregation, we make a spiritually wiser choice than if we neglect any of these steps."⁵⁷ In other words, God allows and accepts congregants to decide whom they want as a pastor.

Upon reflection, this writer sees the incomprehension of the Deacons of RBC with regard to voting as an opportunity for creative dialogue. As pastor, I should have taken responsibility to teach the deacons and congregants about the practice of voting from a theological perspective. Without instructing the church in this regard I participated in the practice continuing without critical examination, which might have led to adopting a different method of decision-making that is based on a biblical model.

The dialogue with the deacons is helpful in highlighting the call system and voting as practices that must be critically considered so that the practices may be

⁵⁷ Virkler, 26.

understood and ensured as useful or not to the church and wider Christian community. Even though the members of RBC are currently using the practice of voting unaware of its history and function, the deacons who served with me in leadership were willing to challenge the practice and discontinue it, albeit in only one aspect of the church business. But as the practice is used to select and elect a pastor, the members are reluctant to relinquish this authoritative act. One member stated, "This is my church! I was born here! We hired you." The member knew that the vote was a tool of the laity that could be used in their relationship with the pastor. The locus of power is emphasized in the statement, "... You are the pastor because we voted for you," also indicates that the deacon knew that voting empowered the members to select and elect the pastor of their choice. Therefore, if the members halted voting, the church would no longer be under their control. In this perspective, having and maintaining authority at RBC means controlling the affairs via voting.

The theme of domination is apparent in RBC. This type of authority manifests itself in interpersonal relations, and can do so in any other Baptist church, Black or white. This authority evolved unilaterally to dominate a context that they believe belongs to them. According to the *Dictionary of Psychology*, "dominance":

Refers to a relationship in which one thing is in a position of control over another. In ethology, it is a tendency to exert control over the behavior of other members of a group [Finally, it is] a personality trait characterized by a tendency to seek and maintain control over other people . . ."⁵⁸

Authority becoming unilateral expressed in the call system at RBC is the problem in the practice of ministry. In addition to Deacon Clyde's statement to me,

⁵⁸ Author S. Reber and Emily S. Reber, *Dictionary of Psychology* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 213.

three more statements were made before my ejection by other lay members to me that characterize the problem. One, “. . . You just preach, and we’ll do the rest.” Two, “This is my church! I was born here! We hired you.” Three, “Who gave you permission to change the order of the service, and why didn’t you come to the deacons first to get permission to do so? You are the pastor because we voted for you.” These statements reveal an interesting perspective of how some of the members of RBC comprehend their relationship with the pastor and the pastoral position. At RBC the pastor is considered an employee of the church and thus is subject to their authority and approval.

The problem addressed by this project thesis raises a significant question: Is the issue of unilateral authority unique to RBC? Based upon Baptist churches having the same protocol the issue is not unique to RBC potentially, and deriving from autonomy in Baptist polity, it is probable that authority can become unilateral in other Baptist churches. In juxtaposition to the case study congregation, two additional congregations are examined, Blessed Hope Baptist Church in Danville, Virginia and Friendship Baptist Church in Yorba Linda, California. The examination revealed that the potential for authority to be exercised unilaterally by a few members of the laity exists across congregations without regard to size, age or racial composition.

Blessed Hope Baptist Church was founded in 1991 by senior pastor, J. Brian Edwards. The congregation is a predominately white with 1,000 members. While conversing with Edwards, I asked him to discuss the elements of power and authority, structurally, in his congregation. He said, “The power that operates in our

church is dictated by wealth and size of family. In fact, power is an epidemic in our church. The power definitely belongs to the members of the church.”⁵⁹ Edwards indicates that when authority metamorphoses so that it is exercised unilaterally by a small number of laity, it can pose a danger to the community. His preference is for a space that is elder led with a multiplicity of leaders. He observed that in his church structure, “the pastor doesn’t work for God; he works for the church members, the powerbrokers. The members view the pastor not as a servant but an employee of the church.” Edwards said that one of the members told him that they *hired* him and that he works for them. What’s noteworthy about that statement is a member of RBC said the same to me. Ethnicity, geographic distance and cultural mores notwithstanding, the risk that authority may devolve into serving the wishes of a few of the members remains a threat to every Baptist congregation.

Lastly, Edwards indicates that when it’s time to vote on important spiritual matters it cannot be assumed that the voter(s) will make decisions motivated by the Spirit. In a context where democracy is operational, the act of voting and the outcome does not denote that the decision was in the best interest of the Church and pleasing to God.

I raised the same question to James Shelby, former chairman for the Pastors’ Search Team for Friendship Baptist Church. Shelby’s position as chairman is historic because it was the first time in Friendship’s history that they had to search for a new pastor after the founding pastor retired. Shelby agrees that authority can become unilateral in a Baptist congregation via the call system, but said that the

⁵⁹ Edwards, J. Brian. Telephone conversation with the author, February 5, 2015.

reason it hasn't at Friendship Baptist Church is because of the system at the church. The system, Shelby says is "congregational accountability, communication, following the model of being Christ-centered, Bible based, and being saved to serve."⁶⁰ According to Shelby, if a revolt were to arise, such as it did at RBC where twenty-three members were allowed to act unilaterally, he believes that the church body would act to prevent such an outcome. What is dissimilar at Friendship Baptist Church, compared to RBC and Blessed Hope Baptist Church, in Shelby's perception is the congregants would not allow an insurgency. At RBC a small group of twenty-three persons arose and were permitted to act unilaterally and ejected me from the pastorate uncontested.

When some of the members of RBC who suffer with the reality of authority becoming unilateral realize that local Christian congregations are spaces for the presence of God's Spirit, grace, forgiveness, mercy, agape love, and mutuality, they should no longer strive to be exclusive in this sacred space. In the New Testament, Paul talks about the *body* Christ, the Church, and states that it is one body. For instance, in Romans 12:5 he states, "... [S]o we the many are one body in Christ, and each one members of one another." In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul discusses spiritual gifts, which are given to individuals for the profit of the body of Christ, and inclusive in that subject matter is the idea of the church being one body. In verse 12, Paul explains, "For even as the body is one, and has many members, but all the members of the one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ." On that premise, communal Christians should comprehend that the church is a sacred space for

⁶⁰ Shelby, James. Telephone conversation with the author, February 18, 2015.

mutuality, which means that this entity is the context in which the Holy Spirit works to change the heart and mind of each member from individualism that utter words such as *this is my church* to genuine connectedness that supports one another.

When certain members of RBC realize that their church is sacred space and thus shared space, mutually, the evidence is the congregation not only grows numerically, but spiritually and social intercourse supplants unilateralism. For example, when my pastorate began in 1997 RBC had 112 members on roll and maybe fifty members active, consisting of middle-aged adults and senior citizens. There were no children in the church. As a new pastor thirty years old, my presence and mentality of inclusion of all peoples and ages, in part, produced numerical growth for the congregation. More youth and young adults joined the ministry and became active. A junior deacon ministry and a junior usher board were established, and a youth choir was organized. During my tenure, the music ministry grew from one senior aged musician working with five choirs, to five musicians, of which four were under the age of eighteen. With preaching and teaching the Word of God in reference to the body of Christ, Christian community and the presence of God's Spirit, the members transformed the congregation to exemplify a sacred space for mutuality. A large part of the problem the disgruntled twenty-three members had with my pastorate was the church growth and positive changes that transpired. Church growth meant sharing, and a communal space of inclusion and not exclusion.

In reaction to the practice of the call system as it operates now at RBC, this project thesis recommends that a *Board of Pastors* work as a guiding entity for local Baptist congregations seeking to secure pastoral leadership—replacing the call

system in which laity are involved in the process more than ordained pastors by voting.

It is reasonable to conclude that the candidacy process in the Baptist denomination is structurally democratic, thus the laity possesses the authority, which has the propensity to graduate to unilateral authority. In the call system, the laity has the final say on who becomes the pastor, and this process is not by definition spiritual just because it functions in the sacred space. In fact, it is a secular one based on its elements. The type of leader God has fashioned to lead the Church is the pastor and is congruent with New Testament model of apostles and pastors (1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11). This type of headship should be regarded and respected, as the pastor creates opportunities for laity to mature as Christians. Thus the pastor, sent by God to the people of God, is established at the call of God, with the intent of managing the people in spiritual affairs—not because a body of people votes for him or her to do so. Therefore, the next chapter presents a new model, contrary to the call system that is based upon a biblical paradigm, which utilizes pastors (apostles) to assist in securing pastoral leadership for local churches.

Chapter 5

Last Call: A New Model

This project is the result of a critical analysis of Baptist polity with particular focus upon autonomy and congregational polity that uses the call system to elect, select and deselect pastors in Baptist churches. This work confronts misguided lay authority that becomes toxic and abusive in that sacred setting. In addition, this project counteracts the members of Baptist churches selecting and deselecting pastors in the manner in which they currently do. With this new plan, local Baptist churches will be congruent with the spiritual intent of working with authorized pastoral leadership that ensures faithful participation in God's mission in the world.

Three things make this project distinct: (1) the model is consistent with a biblical paradigm of God giving and sending pastors to congregations through ordained pastors, (2) This model positions ordained pastors to lead and assist laity in the critical matter of securing pastoral leadership, and (3) This model rearranges laity involvement to work with the Board of Pastors and not control the process of securing a pastor.

Robert Dingman, a professional church consultant, believes "... The most important single act for the congregation is the selection of a leader."⁶¹ This writer agrees that laity's participating in receiving a pastor is the single most important act for the congregation. However, the process of selecting that pastor warrants examination. When pastors lead this effort for laity, congregations are more apt to find and secure the pastor that God intends for that congregation.

⁶¹ Robert W. Dingman, *The Complete Search Committee Guidebook* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1989), 14.

Dingman goes on to say, "The pastoral selection process . . . is a time for everyone to seek God's leading and exercise their own judgment as to whether the candidate meets with their approval."⁶² The issue at RBC is the members control the call system process, independently with no pastoral presence, advice, or direction. Dingman's claim does not appear to accommodate spirituality to the necessary degree that all Christians in a church community qualify as suitable to make such a judgment. It is possible for the laity to participate faithfully when there is evidence that persons are spiritually mature, thus capable of representing the church in that fashion. For Dingman's claim that it is a time for everyone to seek God's leading to work, ordained clergy, in particular, those with theological acumen in spiritual matters should assess laypersons and not vice versa.

Father Henri Nouwen aptly speaks to the demands of Christian leadership by arguing, "Christian leaders . . . have to be theologians, persons who know the heart of God and are trained—through prayer, study, and careful analysis—to manifest the divine event of God's saving work in the midst of the many seemingly random events of their time."⁶³ Nouwen claims that Christian leaders, who are trained and have the skill for careful analysis, reveal and interpret how God is acting in the world in events that are unintelligible to persons who are not spiritually mature enough to decipher the random events. In particular, a pastor is necessary to comprehend God's acting in all events, namely, how God is sending and connecting pastors to local Baptist congregations. The plan below is a recommendation of a

⁶² Dingman, 14.

⁶³ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1996), 68.

solution to the problem of laity's acting independent of ordained clergy in the call system. The model ensures that when a Baptist congregation needs a pastor, it will receive one based on a biblical paradigm of pastors leading the laity.

After Jesus' ascension back to heaven, the Book of Acts reveals that the apostles began to exercise their Christ-given authority to lead the Church. With comprehension of and commitment to the Great Commission, the apostles had the dual responsibility of (1) evangelizing, and (2) planting churches. Now with established churches, pastoral oversight is necessary to ensure that the doctrine of Jesus Christ was being taught properly, and also to offer care for the souls being saved. The apostles were necessary for this type of leadership, which means that they primarily motivated Christians to remain in the Way of Jesus Christ and to offer the teachings of Jesus Christ on earth. The apostles were ordained for leadership that is given to this particular duty and are thus a model of leadership for the modern day church.

There are models of leadership that can be derived from the New Testament. One of those models is that pastors are authorized to exercise oversight and leadership for the laity in all spiritual matters. In this project, the Board of Pastors is appointed to exercise leadership in the process of calling a new pastor. The board would have the authority and be qualified to assist local Baptist congregations regarding the motivation to be Christ-like and fulfill the Church's mission. The board should function in each geographical area where Baptist congregations exist. This group should be composed of local pastors (active or retired) who are experienced and respected leaders. In theory, a group of pastors should organize

the board in its area and communicate the idea to local Baptist congregations that it is there to assist them when needed.

Baptist scholars, Maring and Hudson speak to the need to seek counsel and advice in matter of church affairs. They assert,

Counsel and advice should be sought. It was once the custom of Baptists when confronted by perplexities to address inquiries to an association or regional body in order to secure counsel and advice. In response to such inquiries, either the matter was discussed and the requested advice given, or a committee was appointed to counsel with the church. Today, area ministers and executive ministers are usually persons of experience and wisdom, who can often shed light on questions at issue and facilitate the process of reaching a decision. Especially in cases where something threatens to divide a church, the regional office should be invited to send representatives qualified to act as consultants to help reconcile opposing parties and reach satisfactory conclusions.⁶⁴

In an important act of securing pastoral leadership the laity should seek the expertise from other pastors to ensure sound, spiritual direction. As aptly stated by Maring and Hudson, the selection, election and deselection of a pastor can potentially be divisive, thus having a board will be helpful if the matter begins to become an issue.

The key difference between the candidacy process in the call system and this new model is the entity that authorizes, authenticates, and makes the pastoral position official. In this new model, when the new pastor is confirmed, the worship service is about recognizing God for authorizing and authenticating the pastoral connection, and the congregation makes it official when it receives the new pastor. In the call system, at the point of an installation ceremony, the Pastors' Search Committee is credited with the authorizing and authenticating the call, for the most

⁶⁴ Maring and Hudson, 62ff.

part and it makes it official in this service. In Baptist churches, the pastor is in this position because the people determine it. If the members approve and thus hire the pastor, the pastors are subject to the people. That cannot be the case if the pastor is given and sent to lead the people. The intent of this new plan is to present an alternative to the call system. The new plan is a paradigm shift that involves laity, but in moderation as they work with the board to faithfully confirm whom God has called to serve as the pastor.

The new model sets forth a *Board of Pastors* who understand what the churches need and are positioned as persons with authority to be spiritual guides. In this model, a group of experienced pastors in Danville and its vicinity will have the task of assisting local Baptist congregations in securing pastoral leadership. This theory has already been tested and proven to be practical via a Baptist association in Danville/Pittsylvania County, Cherrystone Missionary Baptist Association. RBC is a member.

Step one: *Establishing boards and building relationships with local churches.* A board is composed of local pastors (active or retired) who are experienced and respected leaders in the community. In theory this model already exists in the structure of an association of churches (the connection and cooperative link of churches in a specific geographical area with intent to enhance ministry and administration). The leadership structure of an association can be: an Executive secretary, a Moderator and divisional presidents serving four areas: (1) Clergy, (2) Men, (3) Women, and (4) Youth. The main role of each division, composed of persons from each member church is to improve and/or enhance ministry. Within

the clergy division, the purposes are to license and ordain clergy, and clergy training. Ideally, within the clergy division some pastors can function as the Board of Pastors.⁶⁵ This concept can work on the presumption that the pastors are theologically trained (formally) ensuring that they have the necessary theological knowledge and skill to provide this type of leadership. If a church is not affiliated with an association, then a group of pastors can organize a board in their area and communicate this idea to local Baptist congregations so that they may offer assistance when needed.

Step two: *The Board of Pastors meets with the congregation in need of a pastor.* When a congregation needs a new pastor, the officers of that congregation, the Deacons will reach out to the board for assistance or ideally, the board is maintaining a connection with each congregation in their jurisdiction for continual support and spiritual guidance. This working relationship will prove beneficial to a congregation in multiple ways. One, when conflict arises within a church, the board assists pastor and people in solving the issue(s). Such action can help to keep the problem(s) from festering and causing irreparable damage, such as the dismissal of the pastor or members leaving the church. I recall a very difficult time toward the end of my pastorate at RBC when my relations with some of the disgruntled members were at an impasse—in particular, a group of twenty-three members. They wanted me to resign, and I refused. If there had been a board available it could have intervened and helped to resolve the conflict in a fair and objective manner.

⁶⁵ However, in Baptist associations, the “clergy” division does not have any power or authority to authoritatively decide on any matter with member churches. In order for that to change, the Bylaws would have to be rewritten and the members would have to be indoctrinated in this regard.

Second, the board can counsel, advise, and provide leadership. For instance, during my first business meeting two-and-a-half months into my pastorate, which RBC calls “church conference,” unbeknownst to me, my job was called for based on the legal process according to parliamentary procedure. In reflection, the group that led that effort was out of order according to parliamentary procedure, the process RBC uses for its protocol. I was unaware of how to react, legally. No pastor should be faced with a situation like that. All pastors, particularly a novice, should have an experienced pastor, preferably Baptist, to call upon in times of ministry and business to assist.

During this initial meeting with the church, the board learns and assesses the needs of that congregation to determine its spiritual, administrative, pastoral, financial, and other ministry needs. This is important because it is extremely challenging for a congregation to assess itself accurately and objectively. Regarding the administration, the congregation may need assistance with paying its bills and other administrative tasks. In this evaluation, the board is looking for the following: (A) has the congregation been traumatized due to the previous pastor dying or retiring, or were there issues of scandal leaving the congregation in pain? If so, the board must help the congregants to heal before the process of finding and securing a pastor commences. (B) The board must learn what the facts are regarding why the former pastor left the congregation. Once that reason(s) is realized, then the board can begin to address these issues via preaching and teaching the Holy Bible so they do not hinder future pastoral leadership. (C) In matters of a long and successful pastorate, the board must help the congregation understand that the next pastor

does not have to measure up to former pastor's accomplishments. One important lesson the board will teach the congregation before the process of finding a new pastor can begin is that pastoral assignments differ from pastor to pastor. For instance, the congregation must not look for someone to carry on a legacy, *per se* but rather seek the person for the mission of the kingdom of God. This understanding can come in the form of Bible classes and meetings.

Once the board learns the character of a congregation and senses in which direction God wants to lead the people, then the congregation is ready for the next step, which is being led in realizing whom God desires to give and send for pastoral leadership. The first move toward that end is forming a Pastors' Search Committee that will report to the board. Once the committee has been composed, the board informs the entire congregation in a called meeting of the process of realizing the spiritual direction of God in sending and receiving pastoral leadership.

Step three: Begin the pastoral search. One of the benefits of having the board is that the process can focus on the need for spiritual leadership rather than on the personal and idiosyncratic concerns of a local search committee. For instance, after a pastoral profile has been developed and the congregants begin their search in the call system and resumes are being received and reviewed, the Pastors' Search Committee bases its choice(s) on what the congregation has already experienced. Typically, the former pastor serves as the model of all future pastors. Having a board leading this endeavor means that the pastoral search begins outwardly—in the sense that the board leads the congregants to seek the Spirit's direction first.

Receiving a pastor should not be based on personal relationships. When the board is working with a willing congregation, that group of pastors has an outward perspective. For instance, the board may know of a candidate who is serving as an associate pastor or assistant pastor and is ready for the responsibility of becoming a senior pastor. This is beneficial because it potentially places a qualified person in the position who has knowledge of the geographical area and who has served as an apprentice.

The board may advertise the pastoral vacancy in a newspaper(s) and on the websites of the church looking for a new pastor and the association to which the church belongs. This method has proven helpful, especially with social media's revolutionizing how people communicate and how information is disseminated.

After the church begins receiving resumes, they need to be examined carefully by people with expertise to assess what qualifies theologically as a good pastor. The time for receiving and reviewing resumes should be finite, e.g., ninety days, to ensure the Pastors' Search Committee will be decisive. The board and the Pastors' Search Committee should be looking for the following when examining resumes: (1) a person who has the conviction of a personal and spiritual relationship with the Lord, Jesus Christ, (2) a person with pastoral experience and/or a reasonable amount of time as an assistant to the senior pastor.⁶⁶ This

⁶⁶ I strongly urge reasonable pastoral experience, and especially an apprenticeship. This practical experience is invaluable. When I was called to my first pastorate, I had neither pastoral experience nor a reasonable amount of practice as an apprentice. That proved difficult in my efforts to govern the congregation. All pastors should have a pastor and/or multiple pastors that he/she can immediately connect with in order to learn the culture of the city, state, and church in which he/she is preparing to serve. This relationship is invaluable. A protégé always continues to glean from the mentor even as the protégé is serving. This relationship will ensure that a first-time pastor has a support system much like a medical doctor in residency.

practical experience should clearly indicate wisdom and experience in, but not limited to, the following areas: business and administration, pastoral counseling, preaching and teaching, and congregational leadership. A pastor must demonstrate the willingness and ability to develop the congregation and assist them in maturing in the ways of God, and (3) a person with at least a Master of Divinity degree from an accredited seminary. A college degree does not adequately prepare the aspiring pastor for the intricacies of the pastorate. For example, the focus of the M.Div. program at Duke Divinity School includes courses in church history, Christian theology, biblical studies and the practice of ministry (including homiletics, and spiritual care).

The process of receiving and reviewing resumes should be presenting some viable pastoral options, and the board and the Pastors' Search Committee will start to see a more clear picture of emerging aspirants for a particular congregation. The congregation in need of a pastor must demonstrate hope and confidence in the Word of God and the leadership of the board regarding God's promise to give and send pastors to the church. With this expectation, congregations will receive a man or woman after God's heart that will feed them with knowledge and understanding and lead them in all spiritual matters.

Step four: *Interview the prospects*. Once the candidate is recognized, the importance of the oral examination is to see the candidate in person, listen to his or her Christian and ecclesial theological positions, and discuss the resume. The primary focus of this conversation is to present an accurate and objective profile of the congregation and to carefully analyze the answers to the prepared questions of

the board and committee that specifically solicit answers that speak to the character of the congregation, its history, specific needs and ideas for advancement, and consequently the candidates' preparedness to lead the congregation.

The interview also includes an opportunity (or multiple opportunities) to preach in front of the entire congregation and to teach Bible classes and Sunday School. The evaluative aspect of the preaching is to ascertain the candidates' theological positions, hermeneutical awareness, homiletical and pedagogical styles and other pertinent abilities. The most important function of the preacher/teacher is to communicate God's Word. The candidate is given opportunities to demonstrate preaching and teaching competence.

In some cases, the interview process involves the candidates' meeting with the entire congregation. In this meeting, both parties are encouraged to ask questions and engage openly/candidly with each other.

Step five: *Choose the candidate to present to the congregation.* At this juncture, the board and the Pastors' Search Committee should have a sense of the best person for the pastorate. After the interviews and deliberate discussions about the aspirant, the board will make a recommendation to the church in a called meeting with the entire congregation. The board will have already communicated to the committee the need to agree on one aspirant and not multiple ones to recommend to the congregation. An element of the call system at this junction is that many churches present multiple candidates to the congregation for a majority vote. The risk of doing that is that when some congregants do not get the candidate of choice, the congregation can be divided.

If the committee cannot agree on the candidate (recommended by the board), the board can lead the process back to resume review or repost the vacancy, or the board may sense that the committee needs more training in how to realize God's choice of a pastor. The discipline of prayer is critical at all phases of the search, but more so at the juncture of not seeing clearly a person who is qualified, capable, and prepared to lead the church in need. The board is an important and necessary guide in this process.

The board works as an advocate for the potential pastor and the church in need of a pastor. Ordained clergy are central to God's communicating both in word and deed to the world and the people of God. When Christians understand that the pastor is a medium between God and congregants, they will see this advocacy as divine influence and intervention. The difference at this juncture between the call system and this new model is the role of the board in advocating for the candidate, the search committee, and the congregation. When the committee and church recognize, regard, and respect the role of the board, the committee and church will receive the recommendation and thus will not need to vote. In the call system the committee presents a candidate(s), the congregation votes, and the candidate with the majority votes wins.

Step six: *Confirmation service of the new pastor.* After the board and the church choose a pastor, and he or she agrees the next step is to confirm him or her in a special service that celebrates, acknowledges and welcomes the gift of a new pastor to the congregation. This type of service will emphasize the joy of receiving and welcoming the pastor with gratitude to God for giving and sending a pastor.

Analysis

1 Samuel 3:19-21 supports the paradigmatic shift from the call system to the usage of a Board of Pastors. The passage reveals: "And Samuel grew up, and Jehovah was with him, and did not let any of his words fall to the earth. And all Israel knew, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, that Samuel was confirmed to be the prophet to Jehovah. And Jehovah again appeared in Shiloh. For Jehovah revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh, by the word of Jehovah." According to this passage, Israel knew that Jehovah confirmed Samuel to be the prophet. The people of God understood the reason Samuel was placed permanently as Jehovah's prophet, which meant that the people would hear from the Lord because of Samuel. Samuel's title and ministry was not a selection by the people but a positioning by the Lord. As a confirmed prophet, Samuel was to be "built up" and "supported" and "fostered" as a parent to be permanent. The prophet has to be positioned by the Lord if God's words are authentically to be inserted into the psyche, lives, and circumstances of Israel. When people select the prophet and pastor, they control the message and the messenger. Therefore, the pastor, like the prophet in this passage, must be confirmed and not installed. In Numbers 27:15-17 "... Moses spoke to Jehovah, saying, let Jehovah, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who may go out before them, and who may go in before them, and who may lead them out, and whom may bring them in, so that the assembly of Jehovah may not be as sheep to whom there is no shepherd."

This new model presents one major difference from the candidacy process in the call system, which is the pivot from the necessary component being the laity and

the search committee to trained clergy (pastors) who will lead a congregation in vital task of securing a new pastor. In a conversation with Deacon James H. Shelby, he articulated his belief that choosing and forming a group of Christians into a committee with the task of finding and calling a pastor is crucial to call system process. He served as the chairman of the Pastors' Search Team for Friendship Baptist Church in Yorba Linda, California, when the church needed to find a new pastor. In dialogue about that experience Shelby says of the committee-forming process, "It was an arduous undertaking from start to finish, but wonderful in that we chose the right twelve people, and we built a team that bonded to accomplish the goal. . . .We are pleased with the results of our work."⁶⁷ In review of that process, forming the search team was most important.

In this project, the board is the focus group that will lead the congregation in composing the Pastors' Search Committee, giving the committee the task of administering the process, and the committee would report to the board and not the congregation, unlike in the call system. The boards' work with the committee will include formality in profile of a pastor that is grounded in theological understandings of spiritual leadership.

I had only two interviews with RBC. Both consisted of just the Pastors' Search Committee and me. There should have been a person(s) in those interviews with pastoral experience, particularly with knowledge of the call and/or appointment systems. That pastoral expertise would ensure wisdom and a functional pastoral theology necessary to guide the process of receiving new

⁶⁷ Shelby, James. Telephone conversation with the author, June 20, 2014.

pastoral leadership. During my initial interview at RBC, the committee asked me generic questions that didn't solicit in-depth knowledge of pastoral theology, meaning my understanding of pastoral ministry in general. What's more, and the questions did not really speak to the idiosyncrasies of RBC or focus on the theological foundations of pastoral leadership or ministry that would possibly be fitting for that congregation at that particular juncture. In fact, the questions led me to believe that the committee's understanding of a pastor was limited to hiring someone to preach, teach Bible class, and to officiate at weddings and funerals.

The interview process would have been greatly improved if the laypeople had pastoral oversight. When laypeople lack a comprehensive pastoral theology that informs its pastoral perspectives, then receiving this type of leader will be important enough that they seek assistance to ensure the congregation is matched with the right pastor. This project positions the board as leaders to ensure that the congregation can sense divine direction in the time of healing, introspection, and prospection regarding pastoral selection and continued ministry. Pastoral theologian Thomas Oden illuminates the importance of the pastoral presence during this process. His insightful point pertains to this process when he says, "To know our modern selves accurately is to know that we too need to be meaningfully shepherded into God's presence or, at least, moral clarity. That requires a well-instructed, trustworthy guide and system of guidance."⁶⁸ For certain, that well-instructed, trustworthy guide is embodied in a pastor. Thus, with the assistance of

⁶⁸ Oden, 59.

a board a congregation can learn about themselves, the church and continued presence with God.

Pastoral leadership is necessary for the church in many respects, but most definitely when seeking to understand the importance of the pastoral position. When this certain type of leadership functions in the church, leaders operate dutifully in leading the congregation into God's presence. The board is an agency of God's Spirit and Word, acting as moral guides, as Oden argues, to the congregation so that it may accomplish step two in RBC's process—creating a pastoral profile. When this pastoral image is put alongside the needs of the congregation, the board can present a true portrait of one who is prepared to lead and thus will best serve the church at any given time.

When the committee is in charge with no pastoral oversight, it is possible that the committee leads the church in making a pastoral selection that is based on personal relations. For example, during my pastorate at RBC, a deacon in his mid-fifties who had spent his entire life at the church and well liked came to me and said he accepted his call to preach. He wanted me to schedule a date for an initial sermon. In the Baptist denomination, the process of licensing involves writing a sermon and preaching that sermon at a special service. It is assumed that after preaching, the licensee will be granted the license to preach simply by delivering the sermon to the congregation. The license is the result of preaching the sermon. The pastor who gives the license has the final say on all matters pertaining to the license.

I considered the possibility of licensing him to preach. I learned he had not graduated from high school but had received his GED in his early fifties. Despite his

being undereducated—not having attended college or a seminary graduate school program—the congregants at RBC prompted me to license him. In the words of many of the members: “He is such a nice guy,” thus that was the main reasons why I should license him.

Six months after I licensed him to preach, I learned that a local Baptist church wanted to call him as its pastor, so he came to me again wanting to be ordained. The ordination process in the Baptist church varies from church to church, and sometimes it includes the association of which a church may be a member. In this case, the candidate seeking ordination would take an exam offered by the ordination committee, consisting of area pastors within the association, and after passing the exam, the committee would agree to ordain the candidate. The exam consists of theological questions.

Again, considering the request, I questioned his preparedness for this type of leadership position given his lack of formal education and pastoral experience. In response to my questions and concerns, he was settled on the fact that, “The people want me,” as he said. I learned later that the reason this deacon and some of the congregants at RBC pressured me to license him is because he had been contacted by a church asking him to be its pastor. The deacon’s mother is a member of the church, and with her influence, her church preselected him prior to licensing, ordination, and even the surety of actual calls to preaching and pastoral ministries. This is an example of an inward, idiosyncratic perspective of finding a pastor in autonomous Baptist churches with no pastoral presence to spiritually guide the process.

The benefit of expanding the search of a pastor, according to Rita M. Elder, a human resource administrator in the Employee Relations Department at Warner Bros. Entertainment who has over fourteen years of experience in the field of human resources, is it increases the prospects of finding suitable candidates. She asserted, "Social media has altered the practices of human resources, thus making this method of communicating necessary for finding potential applicants. Human resource departments use sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and other websites that specialize in posting resumes as credible resources in finding potential candidates for our job listings. The Internet is a valuable tool for human resource departments."⁶⁹

The title of this work is *Last Call* because pastors should be received by congregants and not called as candidates. The correct response of laity should be to receive whom God has sent as an ordained pastor. This new plan elucidates the problem of authority becoming unilateral, due to this system. Again, for the system to function members have to vote, which poses a complication by questioning the authenticity of God's idea of pastoral positioning to Baptist congregations because of the laity's control of the candidacy process. In the act of voting, the ultimate step in the process of calling a pastor, the members cast their opinion and that judgment ultimately determines the pastoral selection, and that decision is final. It is likely and possible that God's Spirit and wisdom can work through the laity, who may discern God's direction in efforts to secure a new pastor. However, seeking the counsel of pastoral oversight will share the responsibility and reposition laity in

⁶⁹ Elder, Rita M. Telephone conversation with the author, July 9, 2014.

Baptist churches to faithful participants in this process without having to control it. The act of voting is not necessarily an expression of spirituality. In fact, the act of voting in Baptist congregations demonstrates democracy.

Last call proposes a model that is not dominated by laity but instead guided by ordained spiritual leaders. In conversation with Betty Jean Coffman, human resource manager and pastoral placement team member at Transformation Ministries, about the importance of seeking and adhering to outside counsel when churches are searching for a new pastor, she says, “The primary goal . . . is to ensure a connection of a healthy pastor with a healthy church.”⁷⁰ This expression gives credence to utilizing a board to ensure the connection of a healthy pastor with a healthy church. A boards’ presence throughout the process enhances this ideal relationship between a pastor and a congregation.

⁷⁰ Coffman, Betty Jean. Telephone conversation with the author, August 7, 2014.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Recommendations

Professor Turner was right in saying the call system and the candidacy process would be an experience. What was revealed was congregational authority has become unilateral at RBC based upon me being selected and elected to the pastorate of RBC and being ejected by twenty-three members without a vote. This fact left an indelible impression on me. In a positive sense, the episodes within the entire experience birthed a passion for the discipline of practical (pastoral) theology. Admittedly, I am a better theologian, pastor, and person for having endured, survived and healed from that wounding experience. After critical thinking and reflection, insightfully, this writer has a clearer perspective as to not only what happened but also why it happened. Valuable knowledge emerged from the candidacy experience at RBC.

The case study is informative. Based upon observation and practical knowledge, four conclusions emerge: (1) lay authority has become unilateral at RBC; (2) This unilateral authority is operative in the call system, which is buoyed by the dynamic of voting; (3) The impetus of the call system is Baptist polity and congregational polity; and (4) The psychosocial dynamic is a factor in the policies and practices of RBC.

The members of RBC realize their authority as an autonomous Baptist church. In the call system, which utilizes the medium of voting for democratic decision-making empowers the laity to be the final decision on all church matters. Some of the dialogue partners have claimed that God is present in the decisions of

the local churches and allows the laity to make decisions. The assumption is that all the decision-makers are spiritually mature enough to make important godly decisions, as the priesthood of believers and the result of the vote indicate God's presence and directive(s). In the call system operative at RBC God is believed to be present in the laity's act of prayer, but the final decision on who will be the pastor is based on a vote. Voting has the power to determine the affairs of the church. In the selection and election of the pastor, voting in the call system also allows the congregants to deselect the pastor at will. The call system, which is operative because of voting, is charged with authority, which is a preferred system because it allows the laity to act, as they will. When twenty-three members ejected this writer without a vote, led by Deacon Clyde who said that there wasn't going to be a vote that signifies authority had become unilateral. Admittedly, the members are voting without any critical analysis and theological basis of the practice, yet they continue to do so because this practice is become tradition as well as a source of power and control in congregational governance. The necessity of voting at RBC even though Deacon Clyde said he and the other members had prayed and heard from the Lord that I was to be their next pastor implies power, control and a dynamic form of dominance. Being expelled without a vote signifies a problem in the case study church. Therefore, this writer reasonably concludes that voting is not appropriate on two very important matters in the church: (1) receiving new members, and (2) the selection and election of a pastor. Voting does not have a good theological basis for new members or a new pastor. Voting however may occur on minor matters of the church, such as a budget, and the purchase of and maintenance of property.

Baptist polity and congregational polity provide the framework for the call system and it sustains authority of Baptist churches. One element of Baptist polity is autonomy and it declares all churches are self-governing. Many of the Baptist scholars cited in this work present ideally, theoretical scenarios in which the thought of the priesthood of believers can exist and Christians can manage the affairs of a local church. At RBC, the authority to guide and govern a congregation is the responsibility of the members, based on Baptist polity and congregational polity. As a member said to me: "This is my church! I was born here! We hired you!" That statement indicates a crude understanding of the relationship between a local church and its pastor. That relationship should be grounded in biblical and theological understandings of ministry.

Again, the research question is: How can this writer intentionally develop a congregational process for selecting a pastor in Baptist congregations that is congruent with a biblical paradigm that is spiritual and faithful to an authentic partnership between clergy and laity in ensuring God's presence in securing pastoral leadership? By the formation of a Board of Pastors, and this pastoral oversight will bring balance and stabilization to that very important process.

This project recommends the establishment of a Board of Pastors who can work in the Baptist denomination to establish a biblical and theological paradigm with which pastors can be identified and received by congregations. This new model is a pivot from the call system that depends upon the laity to be the decision-makers in selecting and electing a new pastor. The new model positions the board as an entity that offers leadership to Baptist congregations who are in need of a new

pastor. When Baptist adherents comprehend the Spirit of God, in more expressive ways than already realized, Baptists can accept the work of a board and allow ordained pastors to lead the process of realizing God's will for pastoral leadership in local churches. In the call system the laity dominate and control the process with no hierarchal or adjacent accountability to ordained pastor(s). When the laity controls the process their authority can become unilateral and thus abusive. This type of authority needs to be balanced. Therefore, the board's presence ensures balance and thus stabilizes the process of realizing a new pastor for Baptist congregations.

In looking forward, this work intends two purposes: (1) to help other clergy in the Baptist tradition, and (2) to help aspiring pastors who have yet to realize their call, and those who have realized their call and who are in theological schools but do not have pastoral experience or a mentor. In particular, this project will be helpful to Black pastors who might serve a Black Baptist church where historically this religious entity has managed the duality of being a sacred and social space.

There are two things I believe will be helpful and could prove invaluable to aspiring pastors. The first idea is broadening the required courses of the theological curriculum to include other disciplines. Upon arriving at RBC, I was thirty years old with no pastoral experience and little business/corporate experience. I was challenged in the area of business, particularly finance and budgets. The M.Div. courses in my seminary experience focused on preaching, teaching, and biblical interpretation. My education was mostly theoretical and offered very little practical experience to prepare me for what I would face in my first pastorate. I do not believe I was adequately prepared for what I encountered in parish ministry. For

theological schools that are a part of secular institutions, like Duke Divinity at Duke University, the seminary should take advantage of other professional schools on its campus and expand the M. Div. curriculum to include some of the following: the business school, to offer finance and basic business practices; the law school, to offer education on the law as it is applied to administering a business, laws addressing church and state issues, and counseling issues as well as business law, estate planning, and real estate law; the medical school, to offer courses on death, dying, and aging; the Department of Psychology, to offer classes on the psyche and emotions; and the Department of Sociology, to offer a means to discuss and analyze congregational studies and issues, particularly understanding the dynamics of a congregation in a rural versus urban area, and ethnic and cultural realities and issues. Expanding the theological curriculum will better equip the aspiring pastors to lead their congregations more effectively.

The second idea is to create a residency program (comparable to a residency program for medical school students). This concept is more engaging than the two 3-month internships I was required to complete in the two summers of my three-year program. After graduation, the students must complete a one-year program after course work that includes supervision in their ministerial context. During that year of residency, once a quarter (or bi-monthly), the student meets with the dean of the program, professors in the disciplines of pastoral care and counseling, and practical theology, ideally with pastoral experience, and some full-time pastors to get assistance with difficult matters that confront them in their context of ministry. The resident has a safe place to vent, ask questions, and sharpen theological

reflective and reflexive tools to continue thinking critically in the practice of ministry and respond accordingly. This experience will offer reciprocal learning for the resident, professors and administrators so that the trends in pastoral ministry influence and shape curriculum. These resources will prove invaluable when the resident is contemplating ministerial, administrative, and theological functions. This work recommends that all seminaries seriously consider adopting the model of a residency program.

The title of this work is *Last Call* because pastors should be received by congregants and not called as candidates. The correct response of laity should be to receive whom God has sent to them as an ordained pastor. Seeking the counsel of pastoral oversight will share the responsibility and reposition laity in Baptist churches to faithful participants in this process without having to control it. When that happens Coffman's thought of connecting healthy pastors to healthy churches will materialize and become the norm in Christian communities.

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